women 2000 and beyond

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Rural Women in a Changing World:

Opportunities and Challenges

Introduction

"We also resolve to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable." —Millennium Declaration, 2000[1]

Rural women play a critical role in the rural economies of both developed and developing countries. In most parts of the developing world they participate in crop production and livestock care, provide food, water and fuel for their families, and engage in off-farm activities to diversify their families' livelihoods. In addition, they carry out vital reproductive functions in caring for children, older persons and the sick.

To understand the situation of rural women, it is necessary to examine the full diversity of their experiences in the context of the changing rural economy, including their position within household and community structures; the gender division of labour; their access to and control over resources; and their participation in decision-making. Rural women are not a homogeneous group; there are important differences among women in rural areas based on class, age, marital status, ethnic background, race and religion.

In many countries, gender-based stereotypes and discrimination deny rural women equitable access to and control over land and other productive resources, opportunities for employment and income-generating activities, access to education and health care, and opportunities for participation in public life.

Rural development is affected by the ongoing processes of globalization: the commercialization of agriculture, the liberalization of international trade and markets for food and other agricultural products, the increase of labour migration, and the privatization of resources and services. These transformations do not occur in a vacuum but interact with other complex processes at different levels, including domestic economic policies, local livelihood strategies and sociocultural structures and practices.

The changes associated with globalization, diversification of rural livelihoods, increased labour mobility, climate change and food insecurity, as well as other global trends, have brought both gains and challenges for women. Although there are common trends, there are also major differences according to regions, countries and even within countries, as well as diversity among women based on class, ethnicity, religion, age and other factors.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic, and in some countries the effects of conflict and its aftermath, have increased the responsibilities of women in rural areas for productive and care work. Climate change and food insecurity are creating new challenges for women in rural areas.

The changes under way in rural areas have a direct impact on women's lives, in both positive and negative ways. Economic changes can intensify gender biases. For example, land privatization programmes can undermine women's traditional land-use rights. On the other hand, women's increased access to paid employment and independent cash income in some areas can positively affect intra-household dynamics and the perception of women's roles in society. Many women, particularly younger women, have found that independent sources of income give them the confidence to question traditional views of rural women's roles both in the household and in society, and to challenge gender biases in access to resources.

Linking rural women to the global market

Transformation in rural areas is linking rural women more closely to the global market. People buy flowers in New York packaged by women workers in Ecuador. A consumer in Sweden buys cheap clothing produced by rural women workers who have migrated to towns and cities in search of work in Asia. A Jamaican domestic worker now living in Canada sends home money to her family living in the rural areas. A South African woman worker picks fruit destined for a European supermarket. A woman farmer in Uganda moves from producing food on her own small plot to farming crops under contract to an exporter. A Moroccan seamstress sews clothing that will soon be on a shelf in a Spanish department store. A woman in a village in Bangladesh makes money by selling the services of her cellphone, and a woman in a village in Jordan is able to find the best market for her handicrafts through the Internet. The extent to which rural women can effectively utilize these market opportunities is dependent on their access to and control over productive resources, assets and services, as well as their roles in decision-making processes.

Despite attention to rural women in international frameworks such as the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Millennium Development Goals, which recognize their contributions, rural women continue to face serious challenges in effectively carrying out their multiple roles within their families and communities. Their rights and priorities are often insufficiently addressed by national development strategies and gender equality policies. Effectively addressing emerging issues, such as climate change and the food crisis, requires their full involvement.

It is important to monitor the changes in the rural economy from a gender equality perspective. As the World Bank has pointed out, the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women is "smart economics".[2] Given the critical role of women in rural areas, addressing gender inequalities can increase the efficiency of resource use and enhance rural development outcomes.[3] Issues such as land and property rights, access to services and resources, food security, employment and income and participation in decision-making need to be taken into consideration.

An important step for increasing the visibility of the role and contribution of rural women was the establishment by the General Assembly of the International Day for Rural Women, to be commemorated on 15 October every year, beginning in 2008.[4]

This publication focuses specifically on the situation of rural women in developing countries in the context of changes in the rural economy. The publication aims to contribute to greater recognition of women's contributions to the social, economic and political development of rural areas and recommends strategies for supporting their contributions. It highlights changes in social structures and patterns of mobility that directly affect their situation. It raises critical issues for improving the situation of rural women in terms of strengthening their capabilities, increasing their access to and control over opportunities and resources, enhancing their agency and leadership, and ensuring their rights and security.

Attention to rural women in the United Nations

Intergovernmental processes

Ensuring gender equality—that both women and men can equally enjoy all human rights and participate in and benefit from all development processes—is a key concern for the United Nations.[5] Over the past decades, United Nations conferences and summits have addressed the situation of rural women. The *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (1995) emphasized the need for the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes that improve the situation of women producers in rural areas, increase their incomes and provide household food security.[6] *The outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"* emphasized the need for women's equal access to productive resources, such as land, capital, credit and technology, gainful employment, and decision-making, as well as access to education and health services. It drew attention to the large number of rural women working in the informal economy with low levels of income, little job and social security, and few land or inheritance rights, or none at all. It highlighted microcredit and other financial instruments as successful strategies for economic empowerment of women living in poverty, in particular in rural areas.[7]

In the context of the *10-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action* carried out in 2005,[8] the Governments of more than 90 Member States provided information on the situation of women in rural areas. Crucial issues raised included the overrepresentation of rural women among the poor, the need to expand education programmes to rural women and girls and to improve their access to microcredit, and the difficulties faced by rural women when trying to gain access to health care, including primary and preventive health care. Several countries noted that the shift from food production to cash crops had a negative impact on the lives of many small and marginal farmers, mostly women, and threatened household food security. More efforts had to be undertaken to strengthen women's participation in decision-making processes and to ensure their involvement in rural development policies. Specific mention was also made of the multiple forms of discrimination faced by rural indigenous women.

In the *Millennium Declaration*, adopted in September 2000,[9] Governments committed to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were subsequently developed, provide a subset of goals, targets and indicators from the global conferences and summits of the 1990s, including the goal to halve poverty by 2015.[10] The MDGs are particularly relevant for reducing poverty among rural women in developing countries. MDG 3 is specifically focused on the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women, with targets on education, health and political participation. Women in rural areas can be actors in and beneficiaries of the achievement of other goals, such as MDG 1, on reducing poverty and hunger; MDG 2, which aims for universal primary education; and MDGs 4 and 5, which focus on children's and maternal health. MDG 7, on environmental sustainability, is also critical for rural women as users and custodians of natural resources.

At the *2005 World Summit*, world leaders reaffirmed that "food security and rural and agricultural development must be adequately and urgently addressed in the context of national development and response strategies ... [and that] rural and agricultural development should be an integral part of national and international development policies". They also reaffirmed that gender equality and the promotion and protection of the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all are essential to advance development, peace and security. World leaders stated that "progress for women is progress for all". Heads of State and Government made a commitment to promote gender equality and eliminate pervasive gender discrimination. They highlighted issues that particularly affect women living in rural areas, such as guaranteeing the right of women to own and inherit property, ensuring secure tenure of property and housing by women, and ensuring equal access for women to productive assets and resources, including land, credit and technology.[11]

In 1992, the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* and its *Agenda 21*[12] recognized the critical role of women in environmental management and development and called for the active involvement of women in economic and political decision-making as a condition for the effective implementation of its programme. Agenda 21 addressed the role of women in national ecosystem management and control of environment degradation and called for measures to ensure women's access to property rights and credit as well as agricultural inputs. The urgency of the situation of women and children living in rural areas was recognized, especially those suffering from drought, desertification and deforestation, armed hostilities, natural disasters, toxic waste and the aftermath of the use of unsuitable agrochemical products. Ten years later, the *Johannesburg Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development* noted that "enhancing the role of women at all levels and in all aspects of rural development, agriculture, nutrition and food security is imperative".[13]

The *Monterrey Consensus*, from the International Conference on Financing for Development in 2002, called upon Governments to establish gender-sensitive investments in basic economic and social infrastructure that are fully inclusive of the rural sector and that ensure sustainable development. The Consensus also recognized the importance of microfinance and microcredit schemes, including for women in rural areas.[14]

During the past 20 years, the Third Committee of the General Assembly has systematically addressed the situation of rural women.[15] In its recent resolution in 2007,[16] the General Assembly urged Governments and the United Nations system to create an enabling environment for improving the situation of rural women, and to ensure systematic attention to their needs, priorities and contributions. Governments should create an enabling environment so that rural women fully participate in the development, implementation and monitoring of macroeconomic policies and programmes and poverty reduction strategies, based on the Millennium Development Goals, as well as in policies and activities related to emergencies, humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction.

The *Commission on Sustainable Development* has also recognized the importance of paying attention to gender equality concerns in order to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development. In recent sessions,[17] the Commission highlighted the need to involve all stakeholders, particularly women and youth, in the planning and management of land and water resources as well as in sanitation systems. Particular attention should be paid to women's equal rights and access to basic services and land tenure and to the provision of education and vocational training to improve their access to decent jobs. The Commission recognized that the energy demands of poor and rural women and children should be an integral part of energy planning and energy projects. The Commission also noted that mainstreaming gender issues into energy decision-making processes was of high priority, including by increasing capacity-building, technical training and enterprise development

for women, involving women in national energy policies and programmes, and investing in energy infrastructure that addresses the concerns of women.

The *United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues* recognizes that indigenous women continue to face multiple forms of discrimination on the basis of gender, race and ethnicity. At different sessions,[18] the Permanent Forum has called for improved access for indigenous women to health care and education and to employment opportunities, and for the protection and promotion of their human rights. The Forum also recognized the Millennium Development Goals as a strategic framework to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women, including for indigenous women, and called on States to ensure that indigenous women's expertise was reflected in all national and international development strategies in consultation with indigenous women and their communities and organizations. It also stressed the need for the participation of indigenous women in governance and decision-making structures at all levels and called for capacity-building and training of indigenous women in leadership skills.

The Third Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2004[19] was focused specifically on the situation of indigenous women. The Forum noted that indigenous women, who numbered more than 150 million throughout the world, often remained invisible because of marginalization and discrimination. They face similar challenges across regions, such as social dislocation due to political conflicts and migration; poverty and underdevelopment due to environmental degradation and lack of access to such public resources as adequate health care and education; and marginalization due to their cultural difference and minority status within States. The deterioration of the natural environment and subsistence-based food security due to economic globalization has contributed to the outmigration of indigenous women to urban centres, where they are no longer under the protection of traditional law and become particularly vulnerable to forced labour, trafficking and prostitution. The Forum issued policy recommendations at international, national and community levels, which called for the increased participation of indigenous women in decision-making and governance; the ending of discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, class and culture; and efforts to address issues in education, physical and mental health, and economic life, as well as in the area of violence against indigenous women.

HUMAN RIGHTS TREATIES

The *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* is the only human rights instrument that specifically addresses the situation of rural women. Article 14 calls on States parties to eliminate discrimination against rural women and to ensure that all provisions of the Convention are applied to rural women.

Article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

(1) States parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the application of the provisions of the Convention to women in rural areas.

(2) States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, shall ensure to such women the right:

(*a*) To participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels;

(*b*) To have access to adequate health care facilities, including information, counselling and services in family planning;

(*c*) To benefit directly from social security programmes;

(*d*) To obtain all types of training and education, formal and non-formal, including that relating to functional literacy, as well as, inter alia, the benefit of all community and extension services, in order to increase their technical proficiency;

(*e*) To organize self-help groups and co-operatives in order to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self employment;

(*f*) To participate in all community activities;

(*g*) To have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes;

(*h*) To enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications.

The *Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women* monitors compliance of States parties with the provisions of the Convention, considers reports in a constructive dialogue with the States parties and, in its concluding observations, proposes recommendations for further steps to be taken to ensure full implementation of the Convention. The Committee also issues general recommendations offering clear guidance on the application of the Convention. In its general recommendation 21 on equality in marriage and family relations, the Committee addressed equality in property rights and noted that discriminatory property and inheritance rights contravene the Convention and need to be abolished. These are critical issues for rural women and their access to productive resources. In its concluding observations, the Committee noted that although a significant population of women lives in rural areas, especially in developing countries, national policies rarely take their important roles into consideration.

The Committee has consistently called on States parties to develop policies, strategies and programmes in priority areas for rural women and allocate necessary budgetary resources; to recognize rural women's contributions to the economy; and to ensure their access to credit, capital, employment, marketing opportunities and productive resources. It has stressed, in particular, the need for rural women's full access to land and property, including through ownership, co-sharing, inheritance and succession. The Committee has noted that the participation of rural women in local and national public decision-making is a means of empowerment and of enhancing access to productive resources. The Committee has focused on the low levels of education and training of rural women, including the particularly high percentage of illiterate rural women, especially in developing countries.

The Committee has also highlighted issues that are rarely raised in other forums, such as the impact of harmful local customs and practices that perpetuate discrimination, including societal and domestic violence. In this context, the Committee has pointed to the situation of older rural women who suffer aggravated marginalization and isolation, which expose them to greater risks of violence.

Two other international conventions address issues of importance to the situation of women in rural areas. At its sixty-first session, the General Assembly adopted the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*,[20] which defines the rights of persons with disabilities and sets out a plan of implementation. The Convention specifically calls on States parties to ensure the equal rights and advancement of women and girls with disabilities (article 6) and makes several references to the rights of people living in rural areas (articles 9 and 26). The right to the highest attainable standard of health without discrimination on the basis of disability includes access for persons with disabilities to gender-sensitive health services close to people's own communities, including in rural areas (article 25). The adoption of the Convention provides a new opportunity for systematically monitoring the situation of women with disabilities in rural areas and for developing policies and programmes to ensure that rural women with disabilities enjoy human rights on an equal basis with others.

The *United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification* is another instrument of importance to rural women. It is the only multilateral agreement on the environment that addresses gender equality issues through its explicit recognition that women need to participate fully in all action to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought.

THE PROTECTION OF WOMEN'S RIGHT TO FOOD IN INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS

The human right to adequate food is of crucial importance for the enjoyment of all rights. This right is recognized in several instruments under international law. After the right was formally recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) established binding legal obligations for States parties to respect, protect and fulfil the right, including for women. While the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) does not explicitly mention this right, several other Convention articles, such as articles 2, 3, 4 and 5, are integral to ensuring to women, on a basis of equality with men, the right to adequate food. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights emphasizes the importance of equal access to food or resources for food. Towards this end, national strategies to ensure food and nutrition security for all should give particular attention to the need to prevent discrimination, particularly against women (general comment 12, 1999).

The World Food Summits in 1996 and 2002 reinforced the commitment to realizing women's right to food. Most recently, the Voluntary Guidelines

on the Progressive Implementation of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security adopted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Council in November 2004 provide important guidance for action from a gender perspective.

United Nations entities

A number of United Nations entities focus specifically on the situation of rural women in their work programmes. The *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)*, for example, established the Socio-economic and Gender Analysis Programme in 1993 to promote gender awareness and provide gender-sensitive methodologies and studies in the areas of agriculture, forestry and fisheries practices and nutrition. FAO has also developed a Gender and Development Plan of Action (2002-2007).

From its beginning, the *International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)* sought to ensure that women benefited from its resources. This concern was incorporated in its *General Conditions for Agricultural Development Financing*. Since the early 1990s, gender equality concerns have been central to the IFAD poverty reduction strategy. The IFAD strategic framework 2007-2010 reiterates the need to take into account differences in gender roles and responsibilities, based on the understanding that addressing inequalities and strengthening the capacity of rural women have a major impact on poverty reduction and on household food security.[21]

The *United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)*, in collaboration with the *United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)*, organized an Expert Group Meeting on the situation of rural women within the context of globalization, hosted by the Government of Mongolia in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, from 4 to 8 June 2001. The meeting examined the impact of major global trends on the situation of rural women in developing and transitional economies and proposed recommendations for a research and policy agenda to maximize the beneficial effects of globalization for rural women.[22]

The changing rural economy and its impact on women

Liberalization policies have promoted the elimination of trade and market barriers and the reduction of government-financed price supports for basic agricultural commodities. They have led, in some cases, to large-scale farming and the prioritization of commercial cash and export crops over food crops for household and local consumption. In many areas, as subsistence agriculture is giving way to commercialized agriculture, both small and large farmers produce for the market and, increasingly, for export. With commercialization, the market plays an increasingly important role, linking rural communities (producers and consumers) to the wider economy. More inputs—such as fertilizers, seeds and farming equipment—are purchased, and much of the output is commercially marketed.

The changes in agricultural production have been accompanied by related changes in the organization of production in both agriculture and industry. These include the intensification of large-scale plantation farming, the outsourcing of production as part of the development of global commodity chains, the creation of rural industries and the establishment of export processing zones. Another important trend is the growing involvement of large agro-businesses in developing country agriculture. These developments stimulate diversification and the further integration of rural areas into international markets.

Non-traditional agricultural export commodities and high-value foods are increasingly important in some developing regions compared with traditional exports, such as coffee, tea, sugar and cocoa. African examples of such diversification include horticultural products and cut flowers in Kenya and Zimbabwe, tobacco in Mozambique, and vanilla cultivation in Uganda. In Asia, aquaculture, such as shrimp farming, has become important, while in Latin America fruit and flower production has increased in many areas.

As aquaculture has expanded since the mid-1980s in parts of Asia, for example, large tracts of coastal land and mangrove forests have been taken over for shrimp farms that export to Europe and the United States of America. While poor and landless families may gain from waged labour on shrimp farms, the land available for local food production has been reduced, soil salinity has

decreased food crop yields and the availability of fish for low-income consumers has declined as a result of competition from aquaculture.[23]

Livelihood diversification is a significant aspect of the changing rural economy. Diversification can take various forms, including: farm-based income via the production of non-traditional exports through own-farm work or wage employment in agribusiness; non-farm income via micro-industry and trading enterprises in rural areas; and wage labour, either in rural industries or via labour migration by family members to work in urban industry and export processing zones.

The landscape of rural areas in the Philippines has, for example, changed as rice paddies were converted to industrial estates and export processing zones. The dismantling of subsidies for farm inputs prompted farming households to desert increasingly unprofitable farming occupations by selling their land or becoming different kinds of farmers. These changes sometimes had very different and unequal impacts on women and men.[24] The following box provides some specific examples of the ways in which livelihoods have increasingly diversified in the Philippines and illustrates the impacts on rural women.

Impact of livelihood diversification in the Philippines on rural women

Large landowners: Women landowners, or women from landowning families who sold their farms to developers, acquired large sums of money which they invested in small businesses, such as convenience stores or basket weaving, or used to buy another farm. Some women "invested" in daughters and sons by underwriting the cost of their migration for overseas employment.

Small farmers: Land conversion occurred as farmers moved from unprofitable traditional crops to more promising (export) crops or non-crop farming activities, such as tilapia or prawn farming, which required making fish or prawn ponds out of farmland. The higher incomes from tilapia or prawn farming provided rural women and men with the capital to develop new enterprises or to expand their existing operations.

Farm wage workers: As farms were replaced by industrial estates or ponds, both landless women and men lost their traditional jobs. Female transplanters, weeders and harvesters were redundant in the new activities. Women were forced to look for different means of livelihood and their options were often limited. They could not engage in microenterprises unless they had capital or access to credit, and they could not work in the new factories unless they had the necessary education or training. Many moved to towns or cities and found work as domestic servants, sweatshop labourers, laundresses, or hawkers of various goods. Younger women were sometimes trafficked as commercial sex workers.

Subcontracting: The operation of industries has led to subcontracting out parts of the production process from high-wage cities to lower-wage rural areas. The move of production activities to rural areas in the Philippines has created jobs for rural women. Despite the exploitative nature of much of the subcontracting system, women have flocked to these jobs as they lost their traditional farming livelihoods.

Exportation of labour: Many rural women have left to work as maids or nannies or to seek other forms of employment in the Middle East and the West. The remittances from these overseas workers have provided rural families the capital to buy farm inputs or make farm improvements. They have also given older women the capital to go into small businesses. In many cases, transfer payments have financed the education of children or younger siblings. The material affluence that is associated with overseas employment has, however, sometime blinded people to the hazards of many of the jobs held by women.

Source: J. Illo (2001), "Earning a living: globalization, gender and rural livelihoods", paper presented at the Expert Group Meeting on the situation of rural women within the context of globalization, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 4-8 June 2001, organized by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) in collaboration with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

The increase in labour-intensive, often export-oriented, industries has also facilitated livelihood diversification. Rural industrialization can include independent entrepreneurs producing for the local market as well as subcontractors producing for larger domestic and foreign firms. Export processing zones take many forms, including free trade zones, special economic zones, bonded warehouses, free ports and maquiladoras.

This development has important implications for rural areas and supports their further integration into the

market in two ways. First, the industries are often located in rural areas offering new employment opportunities to the local rural population. Second, even when labour-intensive industry is not located in rural areas it can provide the rural population with employment opportunities through rural to urban migration, which can have profound effects on both those migrating and those left behind.

In the developing world as a whole, the importance of the rural non-farm sector has risen substantially. In terms of employment, 40 per cent of rural employment in Asia is now found in the rural non-farm sector, and in India it is growing twice as fast as farm employment. In Latin America, a rapid increase can also be seen in Brazil and Ecuador, where the non-farm sector amounted to 30 per cent in the early 1990s. It is estimated that 45 per cent of rural income in 25 African countries stems from the rural non-farm sector.[25]

The expanding rural non-farm sector can have a positive effect in lowering rural unemployment or underemployment through new income-generating activities and may deepen the linkages between the agricultural sector and the broader economy. Non-farm income can allow households to overcome credit constraints, raise productivity and increase farm income.[26] In many cases, however, particularly with the development of free-zone industries and agro-export businesses, rural areas have become a source of cheap, unskilled labour for non-farm activities, often under discriminatory conditions.

The following sections illustrate the impact of these changes in the rural economy on rural women.

Agricultural production

Rural women play critical, diverse roles in agricultural production in the rural economies of developing countries as unpaid family workers, own-account farmers, and full-time or part-time wage labourers on large farms and plantations. According to estimates of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), two thirds of the female labour force in developing economies are engaged in agricultural activities. While globally the proportion of the economically active population working in agriculture declined in the 1990s, in 2000 the proportion of economically active women in the sector was still nearly 50 per cent globally, 61 per cent in developing countries, and 79 per cent in the least developed countries.[27]

Although women make a major contribution to agriculture production, this contribution is underreported in all developing regions because women's work is often unrecognized or is considered part of "housework". Rural women's labour in rural production becomes invisible in the unpaid work category. The capacity of national statistical systems to collect and disseminate information on women's and men's work in agriculture is weak.[28] By not counting the unpaid work of women on family farms, official figures have consistently undervalued the contribution of women to agricultural production.

A study in Burkina Faso illustrates the underestimation of women's managerial role in agriculture. An assessment of production in the context of collective cultivation and male headship indicated male dominance in farm management across all crops (97-99 per cent male ownership/management). However, when individual plot management was considered, a different picture emerged, with women managing a large land area in individual cultivation of the major staple grains farmed for subsistence (42-55 per cent in sorghums and millet).[29]

Women and men carry out different agricultural tasks. In many contexts, women are responsible for weeding and hoeing, crop transportation and food processing, while men do most of the land clearing. Women also contribute to the care of livestock and provide supplementary household resources through income-generating activities.

Raising awareness about the contributions of indigenous women

FAO implemented a project in Mozambique, Swaziland and the United Republic of Tanzania that aimed at harnessing the local knowledge of indigenous people, including women, to strengthen agriculture and rural development. The project—Gender, Biodiversity and Local Knowledge Systems to Strengthen Agricultural and Rural Development (LinKS)—aimed at building a body of indigenous knowledge, with emphasis on gender roles and responsibilities, in relation to biodiversity management and food security, which would be useful for policymakers, researchers and extension staff.

The project in the United Republic of Tanzania explored the local knowledge and roles of an indigenous group, the Masai, differentiated by gender and age, with regard to the breeding of cattle, sheep and goats. The project generated important lessons with regard to the roles and knowledge of Masai women in relation to selection of animals, monitoring the health of animals and preparing

and applying medicines in the treatment of diseases. Masai women are entrusted with the care of newborn calves and are responsible for income generation from the sale of milk products. Masai women have a deep knowledge of livestock and play a key role in the care of animals. The study led to an increase in awareness of the unique contribution of Masai women.

Source: United Nations (2007a), *Indigenous Women and the United Nations System: Good Practices and Lessons Learned*, compiled by the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues for the Task Force on Indigenous Women/Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (New York: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (ST/ESA/307)).

At the same time, rural women play an important and time-consuming role in the reproductive economy, ensuring the maintenance of the family through unpaid work, including the collection of water and fuel, cooking, cleaning, and caring for children, older persons and the sick and disabled. In all developing country regions, this work is critical for family welfare. Rural women work long hours, often under difficult circumstances and without adequate access to appropriate technologies and infrastructure, such as roads, water and sanitation systems and energy sources. These difficulties increase their responsibilities and workloads and constrain their contributions to agriculture.[30]

Women cope with their heavy workloads and time burdens by organizing work with other women, or hiring labour if they have access to income or other funding sources. Another common coping mechanism is to use help from children. This usually puts pressure on girls to take on some of the housework and childcare, often by compromising their own education.

Food security

Women produce the main portion of food grown in many parts of the world and make major contributions to food security. Male migration and increased male activity in cash crop production are increasing women's responsibility for food production. Women in most countries also do the overwhelming majority of work of storing, processing, marketing and preparing food, in particular in sub-Saharan Africa. Women's contribution to food production and food security is constrained by their unequal access to essential resources, assets and services, including landownership and access to extension services.

As a result of agricultural commercialization and policies to replace subsistence food production with commercial crops, the constraints women face in ensuring food security have increased. Such constraints include the loss of access to land previously used for food production; the co-opting of their time and labour for non-food activities, for example to help with new cash crops grown and controlled by their husbands; and the lack of income to purchase food. Studies in Africa have shown that when women increase their involvement in cash crop production, subsistence agriculture is threatened.[31]

Women's access to the land resources necessary for ensuring sustainable livelihoods and food security can also be affected by land degradation. Communal land and forests are decreasing in many countries as a result of pressure from commercial logging, population growth and the expansion of commercial agriculture and non-agriculture enterprises with high income potential, such as factories and tourist resorts. Inappropriate agriculture cultivation methods adopted by impoverished farmers (including women), as well as the encroachment of aquaculture and inappropriately controlled commercial agriculture, may also contribute to land degradation.

The increased scarcity and degradation of land, water and common property resources affect the productivity and economic viability of women's work, in both farm and non-farm activities. They increase the time and energy spent on collecting fuel, water and other common property resources. As a result, women's farming, aquaculture, horticulture and animal husbandry activities are put at risk and food security is jeopardized. The following box examines the impact of desertification on the lives of rural women.

The impact of desertification on rural women

Desertification is caused by a variety of factors, including climate change, population growth, inappropriate land-use policies, deforestation, expropriation of rangelands, land clearance, overgrazing and inappropriate irrigation practices. As a consequence of desertification and decreased access to productive resources, such as fertile land and water supplies, rural women are left struggling with increased workloads and reduced capacity to fulfil

their responsibilities. Decreased soil fertility and soil erosion, resulting from desertification, lead to reduction of crop and livestock productivity. Desertification may cause men to migrate in search of better livelihoods, which leaves women as de facto heads of households. Because of their lower status in the community, women are not involved in critical community decisions regarding land, water, livestock and the management of natural resources. They are not encouraged to contribute their traditional knowledge and expertise to land conservation projects and development projects.

Source: International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) (2006), *Gender and Desertification: Expanding Roles for Women to Restore Drylands* (Rome: International Fund for Agricultural Development).

Livelihood diversification

Although in many developing countries the agricultural sector is still the main employer of rural women, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, rural households are finding it increasingly difficult to support themselves with land-based activities alone and are turning to other sources of income. The strategy a household can adopt to diversify its sources of livelihood depends on such factors as access to productive resources and assets, including land, capital, education and skills. Individuals and households have to allocate their labour between farm and non-farm sectors and between waged and non-waged activities. All of these factors have gender-specific implications. The extent to which women can benefit from the diversification into non-traditional agricultural products, including for export, partly depends on the nature of the production process and on property rights, especially the ownership and control of land.[32]

Two important avenues for women's livelihood diversification in the areas of high-value agricultural exports have been wage labour employment on other people's land and work as contractual farmers to large agro-business firms. The employment opportunities for rural women in Latin America, for example, have increased in the last 20 years as a result of the growth in non-traditional agricultural exports. The following box illustrates the case of increased female employment in the flower plantations of Ecuador and examines some of the implications of this type of waged labour.

Female employment in the flower plantations in Ecuador

In Ecuador, two thirds of all workers on flower farms are women. Research on flower plantations in the Cayambe and Tabacundo areas suggests that this industry contributed to increased incomes in rural areas and stimulated important changes in gender roles within households, including spending patterns, the division of work and decision-making regarding education and health. While most of these changes helped to improve equality between women and men, some negative effects were also observed.

There is evidence that once women started to work as paid labourers in the flower industry, gender roles gradually changed as other family and community members realized the importance of women's economic contributions. For example, a survey showed that men often increased their contribution to housework after women began work. Because of the relative economic independence of young women, there was a drop in the marriage rate among the women working in the flower plantation.

The livelihood diversification created by the flower industry had, however, two negative effects. First, daughters often had to take on increased workloads once their mothers joined the labour force, particularly to take care of younger siblings. This jeopardized their educational prospects. Second, working conditions were often difficult, with long hours of work under short-term contracts. The working day at times reached 14 hours, and factories preferred to hire people on short contracts (three months) to avoid paying social benefits for permanent workers.

Although women's salaries were usually lower than those of male workers, this difference was perceived as justified by the fact that men's direct work with pesticides was considered more dangerous. Women generally felt that employment in the flower industry was preferable to being a maid or a seasonal worker because it meant that they did not need to migrate away from their families in search of better opportunities.

Source: A. Maldonado (2001), "Gender role changes in households provoked by flower industry development", paper presented at the Expert Group Meeting on the situation of rural women within the context of globalization, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 4-8 June 2001, organized by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) in collaboration with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

In Thailand, women subcontract to multinational corporations on family-owned plots to produce baby corn and asparagus on former paddy land, and raise shrimp under contract to foreign companies. Such arrangements in the agricultural export sector often entail labour-intensive manual jobs and low returns. Despite this, the net returns from these activities may be an improvement over the traditional agricultural activities they replace. Such is the case in Thailand, where women now earn more in a shorter workday than they did by cultivating rice.[33]

The positive impacts are circumscribed by other factors. The commercialization of agriculture has seriously eroded many women's traditional sources of power, as they are no longer able to rely fully on subsistence production. The seasonal character of employment in the agro-industry means that although women may experience new opportunities and relationships, they usually return to their homes and more traditional attitudes and practices during part of the year. It is, therefore, more difficult to bring about lasting changes. Employers may also use their kinship or village ties to discipline women and prevent them from joining a labour union or from engaging in other forms of collective action.[34]

The spread of agro-industries and rural industrialization has significantly increased the possibilities for some women to gain access to cash income. With improved access to cash income, women can achieve considerable self-esteem and confidence and strengthen their position within the household. Engagement in wage employment allows women to get out of the relative isolation of their homes or their small rural communities. Sharing experiences on the job helps to create awareness and expand social horizons.[35] It may also stimulate women to reflect upon wider social relations, especially those related to employment and gender relations both at home and at work. The following box illustrates the situation in the Chilean fruit export industry and the impact of women's employment on household dynamics.

The Chilean fruit export industry

The fruit export industry employs a diverse group of women ranging from young unmarried women to older married or divorced women. Women workers have different experiences depending on whether they work for large transnational corporations in the fruit sector or for local subcontracting farms.

Labour relations in the local subcontracting farms often reflect traditional patriarchal norms and relations.

In terms of the impact on household relations, the effects of women's increasing employment in the agro-industry have been mixed. Chilean women who are seasonally employed by the fruit export industry not only increase their contribution to the household income, but also potentially challenge the authority of the male head of household by having access to their own source of cash income. However, a more fundamental transformation of gender roles and division of labour has been difficult to achieve because women are only seasonally employed and have to revert to their traditional role as wife and mother in the off-season. Moreover, even during the periods of waged employment, women retain the primary responsibility for domestic work.

Source: S. Barrientos and others (1999), *Women and Agribusiness: Working Miracles in the Chilean Fruit Export Sector* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press).

Women make up the majority of the workforce in many textile and electronics export processing zones in developing countries.[36] Many of these workers are young, single migrant women from rural areas. In many South and South-East Asian countries, large numbers of women are moving from rural to urban areas to take up employment opportunities, resulting in a distinct increase of women in the labour force in export-oriented industries.

Bangladesh provides one of the most pronounced examples of female-led industrialization. It is estimated that between 1985 and 1989 female labour force participation in Bangladesh increased from 10 to 63 per cent. In addition to the textile and garment sectors, which employ many women, smaller numbers of women have also been drawn into wage employment in pharmaceuticals and fish. A small but growing number are engaged in the construction industry as unskilled day labourers. Many of these women are from rural areas and many are young, mainly unmarried or divorced, with only basic levels of education.[37]

Working conditions for women

The changes in the rural economy had great impact on the working conditions of women. In some cases, export crop expansion has led to a shift of women from per-

manent agricultural employment into seasonal employment. In "non-traditional" horticultural exports, low-paid seasonal female employment has had a crucial role in production in many developing countries. One disadvantage of seasonal contract employment is that it rarely provides access to health benefits and social security. Many employers do not provide written contracts or comply with national labour regulations pertaining to services and health safeguards, such as hygienic facilities and protection when working with pesticides.[38]

One study of the export horticultural sector in South Africa, Kenya and Zambia identified difficulties in balancing paid employment and family responsibilities—given long hours and compulsory overtime—as critical issues for women. Women do not have access to childcare when they work overtime on short notice and their personal safety is at risk when travelling home late at night. As women are perceived to be more suitable for low-skilled and flexible work, they are discriminated against in their access to promotion to permanent, more skilled and better-paid work.[39]

Wages and working conditions in cashew processing plants in Mozambique and India

In both India and Mozambique, cashew nut processing is an important source of wage employment for women. In India, it is estimated that over 400,000 women work in cashew plants in the state of Kerala. Most of these women workers do not earn the minimum wage. Men are more likely than women to earn higher, more secure monthly salaries. Women tend to be paid at piece rates in the shelling and peeling sections. The working conditions for women are also very poor. Women who sit or squat in the peeling sections or stand for long periods in the cutting sections experience numerous health problems, including back strain and reproductive health disorders. Shelling work also involves risk of injury from the caustic liquid from the cashew nut shell.

In Mozambique, workers were drastically affected by the collapse of the cashew industry in the early 1990s. The sector is revitalizing but is only one third of the size it was in early 1970s. For women, however, difficult conditions of work persist. For instance, in one factory in southern Mozambique, work started at 4 a.m. and did not finish until late in the afternoon. In general, women worked longer than men and earned less. In addition, there were no maternity benefits or childcare facilities available to women workers.

Source: N. Kanji (2004), "Corporate responsibility and women's employment: the case of cashew nuts", *Gender and Development*, vol. 12, No. 2 (London: International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)).

Employment conditions in agro-industry are generally characterized by flexible and casualized labour. Case studies of rural industries and export processing zones have revealed low levels of pay and working conditions for women in these industries, worse than those faced by men.[40] Job security for women is often non-existent. For example, in the export industries of the Philippines, jobs (under piece-rate arrangements) are temporary and seasonal (peaking at certain times, such as Christmas), afford little social protection and are low-paid. Women lose their jobs when they become pregnant, and women workers have been vulnerable to sexual advances of employers.[41]

Low levels of female education, as well as a plentiful supply of female labour, make it difficult for women in the new industries to improve their working conditions. Labour organizing and negotiating for higher piece rates are very difficult, given the large numbers of women seeking work. In addition, new work arrangements have been introduced to increase the competitiveness of agribusiness enterprises, rural industries or export processing zone firms and contract farming. These arrangements often involve complex contractual arrangements, which are not understandable for the poorly informed new employees who have little or no formal education.[42]

The evidence on whether the new employment opportunities for women, including in the agro-industry and industrial sectors, have led to exploitation or improvement of women's situation is mixed, and varies between countries, industries and even employers. For example, in the Philippines more factories in the industrial estates or export processing zone pay the legislated minimum wage than those outside those zones, even though wages are still considered low.[43] Many rural women who have moved into the new industries enjoy higher incomes compared to their livelihoods as small-scale farmers or informal sector workers. However, many women also

face exploitative situations, with long working hours, unacceptable working conditions, low wages, insecurity of contracts and risk of abuse and harassment.

Labour rights for rural women workers include labour laws relating to all workers, both women and men (for example, on minimum wages and safety), and laws particularly concerning women (for example, on non-discrimination and maternity leave, and "protective" legislation). In many countries, formal labour legislation does not apply to the informal sector in which many women are employed in rural industries.[44]

Women's labour rights are limited by the general lack of implementation of labour legislation, including equal-pay provisions. Although there is widespread prohibition of sex discrimination, these provisions are not always respected in practice. Women's access to employment may be restricted by family law requiring the authorization of the husband. Legislation on sexual harassment may not exist or be implemented. Women's access to agricultural work may be constrained by "protective" legislation that prohibits women from working in specific occupations or at night.[45]

Maternity leave provisions are uneven across countries. Pregnancy testing and even sterilization practices have been documented in some countries. Women often work without contracts on a daily and piecework basis. Under employment contracts signed by male household heads, women may be required to provide labour although the wages are paid to the head of household.[46] Women non-permanent workers are also underrepresented in trade unions and workers' committees, which address issues of workers' rights.

As the rural sector increasingly resembles the urban or industrial sector in terms of the organization of production, labour relations and the importance of the cash economy, there are new opportunities for grass-roots organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and labour unions to engage in collective organizing for labour rights. In the last two decades, NGOs and grass-roots organizations have gained considerable experience with organizing women, especially those employed in the informal sector.[47] The global diffusion of information and communications technologies, although uneven, has also created new possibilities for networking, advocacy and lobbying for rights among interest groups in rural areas all over the world. Unfortunately, however, traditional labour unions still reflect urban and gender biases and largely tend to ignore women's issues and the informalization of labour conditions.[48]

Whether defined as the lack of a minimally adequate income or as the lack of essential human capabilities, poverty is pervasive throughout the world, particularly in rural areas. In 2002, the percentage of the population in developing countries surviving on income of US $1 or less per day was 19.2 per cent, ranging from a low of 2.4 per cent in the Middle East to a high of 44 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa.[49] The agricultural sector is still responsible for the major share of the economy in many developing countries and is a critical element in poverty eradication in rural areas, particularly for women.

Poverty is a complex phenomenon, difficult to assess and combat. The shift in the debate from "income poverty" to "human poverty", which requires attention to and data on such capabilities as literacy, levels of health and nutrition, and entitlement to assets and resources, such as land, irrigation, capital and extension services, rather than-crude estimates of income, is a very positive one. A focus on asset and resource distribution provides a more sensitive measure of poverty, particularly in rural areas, and in relation to women.

In poverty eradication efforts, the household is still often used as the basic unit of analysis. This focus on the household, without attention to intra-household relations, constrains development of adequate understanding of the differences between individual women and men in distribution of food, income and productive resources. Efforts to understand the gender dimensions of poverty have often focused on resource-poor female-headed households but failed to identify the female poverty that exists in relatively wealthy male-headed rural households. Evidence suggests that incidence of poverty is higher, more severe and increasing among women.[50]

Two particular aspects of poverty, time poverty and hunger, have clear gender dimensions, particularly in rural areas. There are significant time allocation differentials between women and men in the rural areas of developing countries. Women work longer hours than men and perform multiple roles in both the productive and reproductive spheres. Globally, women spend 40 billion hours annually on water collection, which reduces the time available for other important activities, including income generation.[51] The illness of family members due to HIV/AIDS imposes an additional demand on the labour and time of rural women, necessitating extended caregiving, which falls disproportionately to older women and girls.

Poverty is also reflected in undernourishment and malnourishment, which are common features of life in the rural areas of many developing countries, in many cases resulting more from inadequate income or purchasing power, lack of know-how and differential access to resources within the household rather than from food shortages. Because of gender inequality within most households, women and girls are at the end of the food chain. Their diet is low in calories and protein, which results in weight loss and reduced resistance to diseases. Hunger inhibits women's work in food production and has a negative impact on the food security of the household.

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), which are prepared by Governments through a participatory process involving civil society and development partners, are one important strategy to address poverty. Some PRSPs have provided specific indicators to monitor gender-responsive actions in the areas of infrastructure, agriculture, rural development and financial services. The PRSP for Mali, for example, reported the percentage of female entrepreneurs and the percentage of women benefiting from microenterprise as PRSP progress indicators. It also proposed training women in rehabilitation and conservation techniques for water and land as part of the PRSP's infrastructure and production sector pillar.[53] The interim PRSP in Rwanda included legal issues related to gender equality. It discussed the recent revision of the family code, which now offers couples the option of common ownership of property assets. In addition, it proposed a new labour code and land legislation that would remove restrictions on women's ability to work and own property.[54]

The participatory processes in PRSPs aim to orient social and economic policies towards improving human development for all, including through supporting gender equality, equal opportunities and the elimination of all forms of discrimination. However, the record of PRSPs on participation of rural women is mixed, and poverty reduction policies and programmes in most countries continue to neglect gender equality perspectives, as gender equality goals are considered subordinate to other policy objectives.[54]

Participation in PRSP processes is usually limited to consultation processes, which are not always gender-sensitive, and are often restricted to a small number of NGOs.[55] Little is known about the extent of consultation with rural women. National machineries for gender equality, which are mandated to ensure the empowerment of women in rural areas, are often under-resourced and lack access to decision-making processes, and are thus inadequately involved in PRSP processes.[56]

Gender perspectives must be fully integrated into all PRSPs and other strategies and plans for the eradication of poverty in rural areas, including reporting on the Millennium Development Goals, and ways and means of increasing consultation with and participation of rural women strengthened. All data must be disaggregated by sex and age. The priorities and needs of specific groups of rural women, such as indigenous women, disabled women, widows and women heading households, must be given particular attention.

Gender-sensitive capacity development must be increased to ensure that all categories of personnel involved in poverty eradication are equipped to identify and effectively address gender perspectives in their work. Gender-responsive budgeting methods and procedures must be systematically and effectively utilized to ensure gender-sensitive resource allocations in all areas critical for rural women. Ministries of Finance and relevant line ministries, including Ministries of Agriculture, must receive sufficient training in this area. Specific targeted assistance to address the gaps and challenges faced by rural women should be increased.

Climate change represents a complex and multifaceted threat to global security. As a result of mainly human activity, the climate is changing—becoming less stable and more volatile and warmer. Seasons arrive at different times than normal; glaciers are receding; and sea levels are rising. As the planet warms, it is likely that there will be an increase in the frequency and severity of floods, droughts and other natural catastrophes. Droughts and floods are already contributing to crop failures, food shortages and other human suffering.

There is a broad consensus that climate change is best addressed in the context of sustainable development. Unless it is dealt with effectively, climate change will have a dramatic impact on the environment and on economic and social development. Climate change is also likely to exacerbate both natural disasters and, potentially, conflicts over natural resources. The impact of climate change cuts across a range of policy areas, including food security, water management, energy, human settlements, transport and health. It is linked to issues of human rights and governance. The effects of climate change will be disproportionately severe for the most vulnerable groups and threaten to put the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals beyond reach.

Addressing climate change effectively requires efforts on both mitigation of risks to reduce vulnerability and development of adaptation strategies to build resilience. This involves recognizing countries and groups that are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and supporting these countries and groups in disaster risk management and reduction. Central areas of concern in addressing climate change include making use of technology and innovation, and financing appropriate responses.

It is widely recognized that rural women in developing countries are especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change. For example, drought and intermittent rainfall patterns directly affect women as primary producers of staple food and as consumers. Desertification has increased the time burden on women and girls, as they have to walk further to collect water, which may put them at risk of gender-based violence, or may result in their forgoing such opportunities as attending school and undertaking income-generation activities. Women contribute much of the labour required for coping with climate risks, for example in soil and water conservation, the building of anti-flood embankments and increased off-farm employment.[57]

Women make up a large number of the poor in communities that are highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihood and are disproportionately vulnerable to and affected by climate change. Women's limited access to resources and decision-making processes increases their vulnerability to climate change. Women in rural areas in developing countries have the major responsibility for household water supply and energy for cooking and heating, as well as for food security, and are negatively affected by drought, uncertain rainfall and deforestation.[58] Because of their roles, unequal access to resources and limited mobility, women in many contexts are disproportionately affected by natural disasters, such as floods, fires and mudslides. It is important to identify gender-sensitive strategies for responding to the environmental and humanitarian crises caused by climate change.

Gender perspectives need to be considered in both mitigation and adaptation work to ensure that the needs, priorities and contributions of women as well as men are taken into consideration in research, policy development, and programmes and initiatives on climate change. Gender inequalities in access to resources, including credit, extension services, information and technology, must be taken into account in developing mitigation activities. Adaptation efforts should systematically and effectively address gender-specific impacts of climate change in the areas of energy, water, food security, agriculture and fisheries, biodiversity and ecosystem services, health, industry, human settlements, disaster management, and conflict and security.

Women are not only victims of climate change but also effective agents of change in relation to both mitigation and adaptation. Women have a strong body of knowledge and expertise that can be used in climate change mitigation, disaster reduction and adaptation strategies. Women's responsibilities in households and communities as stewards of natural resources have positioned them well for livelihood strategies adapted to changing environmental realities. Women tend, however, to be underrepresented in decision-making on sustainable development, which impedes their ability to contribute their perspectives and expertise on climate change.

Financing mechanisms to respond to climate change must be flexible enough to reflect women's priorities and needs. The active participation of women in the development of funding criteria and allocation of resources for climate change initiatives is critical, particularly at local levels. Gender analysis of all budget lines and financial instruments for climate change is needed to ensure gender-sensitive investments in programmes for adaptation, mitigation, technology transfer and capacity-building.

Technological developments related to climate change should take into account women's specific priorities and needs and make full use of their knowledge and expertise, including traditional practices. Women's involvement in the development of new technologies can ensure that they are user-friendly, effective and sustainable. Women should also have equal access to training, credit and skills development programmes to ensure their full participation in climate change initiatives.

Food crises

The recent dramatic escalation of food prices has caused a crisis worldwide and represents an unprecedented global challenge that has affected millions of people, particularly the most vulnerable. The numbers of hungry people around the world are growing. The high food prices threaten to undermine progress towards achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals, and in particular the goal of eradicating hunger.

The crisis has multiple and complex causes, many of which are interconnected. Drivers of the crisis include lack of investments in the agricultural sector, rapidly rising demand for food due to economic growth and higher incomes, trade-distorting subsidies, recurrent bad weather and environmental degradation, rapidly rising

energy prices, subsidized production of biofuels that replaces food production, and the imposition of energy restrictions leading to hoarding and panic purchasing.

A successful response is critical to ensuring revived global progress in eradicating poverty and hunger and to ensuring sustainable rural development. The short-term responses include mobilizing additional resources, enhancing food assistance, strengthening social protection measures and targeting support to small farmers. In addition to the immediate emergency relief responses to the humanitarian implications of the crisis, there must also be a more long-term response that supports countries in strengthening agricultural capacity, improving transportation, storage, financial services and market facilities, and strengthening overall economic and trade policies.

Food crises have a disproportionate impact on women and girls. Women play a critical role in food production, but their unequal access to critical resources significantly limits their potential to ensure sustainable livelihoods and food security for households and communities.[59] High food prices mean that the poor will have to spend a larger proportion of their income on food and will probably buy less food or food that is less nutritious, or will have to rely on outside help to meet their nutritional needs.

Effectively addressing the food crisis in both the short and long term requires an explicit focus on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. There must be specific attention to women in the short-term responses because in some societies discrimination in food distribution still occurs. For example, the practice for men and boys to eat before women and girls may further compromise the vulnerable nutritional and health status of women and girls in times of food shortages. In addition, women have unequal access to income and to credit facilities, which are essential to ensuring supplementary food for an adequate, diverse diet.

Women should be actively consulted on and involved in any food distribution responses to ensure that the food is appropriately distributed for the benefit of families. In addition, women should have equal access to all forms of support, such as income-generating programmes, credit facilities and other social programmes related to the food crisis. Evidence shows that women are more likely to spend their income on food and child welfare, leading to better nutritional outcomes, and that they are less likely to sell or trade food for non-food items.

In the longer term, the constraints faced by women in many parts of the world in effectively carrying out their roles in food crop production and contributing to the reduction of poverty, hunger and food insecurity should be explicitly addressed. Attention to the needs, priorities and contributions of women as well as men must be systematically included in all policies, plans, resource allocations and activities in response to the food crisis. All data, for example on nutritional status and the impacts of food crises, as well as data collected on the responses to such crises, should be disaggregated by sex and age.

It is important to recognize that averting food crises in the future will be dependent on more effective and systematic long-term attention to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in rural areas.

Changing social structures and patterns of mobility

Changes in the rural economy, such as commercialization of agriculture, livelihood diversification, and increased labour mobility and migration, as well as changes in the roles and contributions of rural women, have had profound effects on social structures in rural areas in developing countries. Social changes within households have an impact on the composition of households, the division of labour, and access to resources, as well as on gender roles and relations.

Changing patterns of household division of labour

Households comprise a complex set of social relations, with household dynamics based on a mix of factors: individual members' needs and expectations; gender relations, including the division of labour; generational hierarchy; wider social expectations and norms; and specific traditional or religious beliefs and practices. The position of each individual in the household is determined by four key factors: ownership and control over assets, especially land; access to employment and other income-earning means; access to communal resources (such as village commons and forests); and access to external social support systems, such as patronage, kinship and friendship relationships in which other than economic factors take precedence.[60]

The opening up of new opportunities with increased economic returns can increase the demand for both male and

female labour. The changing economic environment and increased employment opportunities for women can affect the roles and status of women within households in a positive way. As rural families diversify their livelihoods, the household division of labour changes. Women's access to alternative sources of income has the potential to improve their status and bargaining position and to transform gender relations. However, to date, there is little evidence of such positive changes.

The majority of rural households respond to new opportunities and challenges by restructuring the household division of labour so that women and children assume greater workloads. Often, women's labour is diverted to productive activities on their husbands' crops or women are drawn into wage labour. In poor rural households, child labour is particularly important for achieving livelihood security.[61] For rural families primarily engaged in farming, male migration can result in labour shortages and dramatically change the traditional division of labour. This can limit the ability of women to benefit from new economic opportunities.[62] The net effect is often increased workloads for women and, in some cases, lower agricultural productivity because of labour shortages for such activities as clearing land and ploughing.

In order to ensure that women benefit from changes within the household division of labour, rural women need greater control over their own labour and decisions regarding its allocation. They need control over the resources generated by their new activities to enable them to invest in time-saving equipment, to access technological innovations to improve their labour productivity, and to hire labour to relieve their work burdens.

Changing household composition

In the context of the changing rural economy there are an increasing number of households headed by women as well as those containing several generations. Increased labour mobility is one of the most important reasons for changes in household composition. Because of the need to migrate as part of household survival strategies, household members may be dispersed, with some residing in towns and others in rural areas. The migration of younger people from rural to urban areas results in the accelerated ageing of the rural population. Male migration leads to increased numbers of female-headed households in many rural areas. Women are also increasingly migrating on their own in search of employment, which has a significant impact on household structures and composition.

Exposure to new ideas through the spread of mass media and exposure to external influences can also influence family composition, for example by changing the attitudes and expectations of young people regarding marriage and divorce. Given increasing economic independence, young women may, for example, opt to delay marriage.

The rise of female-headed households has challenged the traditional gender-based roles in rural areas. With regional variations, women are currently reported as household head[63] or "reference person" in from 9 to 42 per cent of households globally.[64] As female-headed households often face particular difficulties in meeting household needs, they must be recognized as a separate category by policymakers.

When men migrate on a temporary and seasonal basis, households may be headed by women. In many cases, however, men may continue to maintain the decision-making power even though they are not physically present. There are also a significant number of female-headed households without links to a male partner because the women are not married, or are widowed, divorced or abandoned. In these households, women have the decision-making power and the full social and economic responsibility for the well-being of household members.

Another emerging trend is the growth of multigenerational households. The precise composition of these households varies. Extended families and multigenerational households may include additional kin or may have a missing middle generation because of out-migration or HIV/AIDS-related deaths, particularly in Africa. This results in a growing number of households in which grandmothers, single mothers and even children are responsible for extended households, which also include non-family members.

The impact of HIV/AIDS on rural women

The composition and livelihoods of rural populations are increasingly affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The seriousness of the impact on rural women is illustrated by recent statistics. Globally, HIV infection rates among women continue to rise disproportionately, with 17.5 million women living with HIV in 2005—1 million more than in 2003. Most HIV-positive women live in sub-Saharan Africa, but the epidemic is affecting growing numbers of women in South and South-East Asia (where almost 2 million women now have HIV) and in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In sub-Saharan Africa, nearly three out of four young people from 15 to 24 years of age living with HIV are female. The impact of the epidemic on women in sub-Saharan Africa remains disproportionate. Most of the women who die are at the prime of their productive life, and their deaths deprive

families and communities of food producers, teachers, mothers and carers.[65]

According to Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimates, HIV/AIDS has been responsible for the deaths of 7 million agricultural workers since 1985 in the 25 hardest-hit countries in Africa, and could lead to the deaths of another 16 million before 2020.[66] HIV/AIDS erodes the asset base of rural households, depletes their labour force, reduces their range of knowledge and skills, restricts their ability to earn cash from farming and non-farm activities, and undermines their ability to feed themselves and maintain adequate levels of nutrition.[67] Physical vulnerability and social vulnerability combine so that young women are particularly vulnerable—both to the disease itself and to its broader impacts (as caregivers and widows). The deaths of farmers who do not have the opportunity to pass on knowledge to their children have a serious impact on agricultural practices and food security.

Increased mobility, improved transport systems and greater movement of people can contribute to a changing pattern of HIV/AIDS. For example, studies from India report increased income for men and decreased options for poor women as contributing factors in the growth of sex for sale. According to one estimate, 11 per cent of truck drivers are HIV-positive, as roadside prostitution has increased in recent years. These men bring the risks of infection home to their wives.[68]

The links between property rights, HIV/AIDS and the position of rural women have become evident in many parts of Africa. According to FAO, women in households affected by HIV/AIDS are particularly vulnerable to poverty. Without formal and clear title to their land, women often lack the resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods for their families. For example, in such countries as Namibia and Uganda,[69] where land law and property rights are made up of a complex system of overlapping statutory and traditional law, the rights of women to inherit, own and manage land may be neglected. The FAO study found that over 40 per cent of widows had lost cattle and tools, seized by relatives after the male head of household had died. When women lack title to land or housing, they have a narrower range of economic options and they may face homelessness, poverty and violence, contributing to the impoverishment of the entire family.[70]

The response to HIV/AIDS in rural development must involve an integrated and gender-sensitive approach, focusing on a range of issues across all sectors, including HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention campaigns, legal rights, expanded access to HIV services, new social and economic safety nets, and labour-saving food production technologies.[71] One innovative initiative, for example, has linked credit to HIV prevention work on violence against women. The Intervention with Microfinance for AIDS and Gender Equity programme in Limpopo Province, South Africa, integrates HIV prevention and violence training into its microfinance programmes for rural women. The aim of the programme is to provide women with small loans to start businesses and gain greater economic independence.[72]

The situation of rural widows

In regions across the world, especially in traditional societies, women face significant challenges after the demise of their husbands. Widows can fall into abject poverty, as they are often not entitled to inherit property and may not receive any support from their late husband's relatives. They may even be victims of violence, evicted from their homes and robbed of their household possessions.

A study from Zambia showed that in the wake of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the percentage of households headed by widows in rural Zambia increased from 9.4 to 12.3 per cent between 2001 and 2003. Furthermore, within one to three years after the death of their husbands, widows who headed households in rural areas, on average, controlled 35 per cent less land than they had prior to their husband's death. The study found that women in relatively wealthy households are particularly vulnerable to losing land after the death of their husbands. The study also revealed that widows in both patrilineal and matrilineal villages are equally likely to lose their rights to land.

Source: A. Chapoto, T. S. Jayne and N. Mason (2007), *Security of Widows' Access to Land in the Era of HIV/AIDS: Panel Survey Evidence from Zambia*, Policy Synthesis Food Security Research Project—Zambia Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Agricultural Consultative Forum (Lusaka, Zambia: Michigan State University), No. 22.

Changing patterns of labour mobility

In recent years, population movements have accelerated both within countries and across national boundaries. At the global level, there were 191 million international migrants in 2005. Nearly half of all migrants worldwide

are women, with women being more numerous in developed countries than male migrants.[73] While in the past women traditionally accompanied or joined male family members, they increasingly migrate on their own for employment.[74]

A number of different migration patterns exist in rural areas. These movements are from rural to rural areas, as young women join the agro-industry workforce; from rural to urban areas, when girls and adult women leave for towns and cities to enter the service and manufacturing sectors, including the export processing zones; and international, as women move abroad to work in a diverse range of occupations, including as nannies, maids, factory workers, teachers and nurses.[75]

The forced migration of women also takes place because of conflict and natural disasters, as well as through trafficking in women and girls for the purpose of exploitation, including prostitution and forced labour. Women are trafficked in different ways: they are kidnapped, sold by their families or given false promises of well-paid jobs. Trafficking is driven by the demand for cheap labour, the growth of the commercial sex industry and restrictive immigration policies.[76]

Migration generally results in the redistribution of tasks and responsibilities among those left behind, and there is evidence of a strong impact on gender relations. Migration can be an empowering experience for women—both those left behind when men migrate and those who migrate themselves—allowing them to exercise greater autonomy over their lives.[77]

Different migration scenarios need to be taken into account when considering the impact of migration on rural women: the situation of women left behind when other family members migrate; the situation when women themselves migrate; and the effects of the return of women migrants to their countries of origin. Each type of scenario has different costs and benefits. For example, migration of young family units can result in an ageing rural population in rural areas. Independent female migration may create increased independence for women but have other short- and long-term consequences for families that are not always taken into account.[78]

When women are left behind

In many areas, male migration has contributed to a rise of female-headed households, a phenomenon that has challenged the traditional patterns of gender-based roles in rural areas. For example, it has been estimated that approximately one third of the households in sub-Saharan Africa are permanently headed by women, either widows or women who are single, divorced or separated from their partners.[79] Many more farm households are de facto headed by women while men are away.

With increased migratory flows and the absence of husbands or male members of households, women take over traditionally male tasks and responsibilities. The women left behind potentially face difficulties, such as increased burdens on their time, inadequate access to resources, and restrictions on their ownership of property and participation in decision-making. In Uganda, for example, while male smallholder farmers often outmigrated, leaving women responsible for cultivation and management, the men still retained ownership and control of decision-making.[80] This resulted in delayed decision-making, which adversely affected animal health and crop productivity. In some cases, because of the absence of the husband, the woman had to move in with her husband's relatives and control over resources was passed on to other male relatives.

The impact of the additional workload on women is considerably noticeable in areas where social support systems and services are weak or eroded. Often children, particularly girls, are called upon to assume domestic tasks, thereby compromising their own education. Women employ different strategies to compensate for the loss of male labour. They may organize labour exchange with other women, work longer hours themselves or, if they have means from remittance and other income sources, hire additional labour. They also adopt such strategies as reducing the area under cultivation or switching to crops that may be less labour-intensive but also less nutritious.[81]

Female heads of households often face greater obstacles than male heads of households in meeting the needs of their households, because of lower economic and social status, lack of resources and lack of control over agricultural income, and a heavy workload that may reduce their overall productivity. Their situation is further exacerbated when they receive few or no remittances.

Despite these problems, male migration can bring substantial benefits to the women left behind in rural areas, including increased empowerment. The most obvious benefit is increased family income through remittances. Women may also have an opportunity to acquire new skills and capacities. Running a household in the absence of adult male members can help women gain more self-esteem and independence.[82]

When women migrate

The migration of women is governed by gender norms regarding the appropriateness of their migrating alone, their role and position within their families, the level of their social and economic independence, and the availability of networks that provide information on and facilitate access to employment.[83]

Lack of access to resources at home, particularly productive land, is one factor that contributes to women's migration from rural areas.[84] Women also migrate in order to escape the hardship of rural life and patriarchal and social control. There are also many positive pull-factors that encourage rural women to migrate, including attractive income earning opportunities at the intended destination.[85]

When women migrate in search of new job opportunities, they may develop new skills, attitudes and behavioural patterns and decide to build an independent life rather than resume their former roles. For many women migrants, the migration process may contribute positively to their self-esteem, because they have to assume more responsibilities and gain new experiences as migrants. In addition, their remittances often provide an important source of cash income for the family and increase their standing in their households and communities.[86]

The extent to which this positive effect materializes depends on a number of factors, including the legal status of migrants and the general attitudes toward migrants, as well as the gender-specific policies and practices in receiving countries.[87] The nature of the migratory networks women use for assistance in finding a job and/or for a safety net in times of emergencies is also important. Networks based on patriarchal control can weaken women's ability to take advantage of new opportunities, such as exposure to new values, roles and market demands. In addition, middlemen or agencies can play a central role in organizing the migration of rural women, with the possible risk of exploitation.

Migrant women are often uninformed about their rights and obligations, which leads to different forms of exploitation, including harsh and dangerous working conditions; violence by employers; low pay; confiscation of identification documents; and deportation. The effect of gender-based discriminatory behaviours is often compounded by their status as foreigners and by racist treatment in the receiving countries. Migrant women may enter illegally in the receiving country or be recruited for mostly unskilled and low-paid jobs that provide little protection from abuse.[88]

The absence of women who migrate can have a significant impact on families and communities left behind. On the positive side, remittances from women migrants contribute to greater quality of life, better health and education, and investments in housing or businesses. However, the effects on children left behind when women migrate are increasingly identified as problematic. Generally, men do not necessarily take on additional domestic roles. Negative outcomes of migration on families left behind include an increase in social problems, such as low educational achievements, early pregnancy or increased drug use among children.

An often-unexplored dimension of women's migration is the personal cost experienced by many migrating women who leave their families behind to provide economic resources.[89] While men's absence is mostly perceived as part of their responsibility as providers for their families, women migrants may receive social blame for not fulfilling their traditional roles as caretakers.[90]

When migrants return

Women who migrate and return, whether temporarily or permanently, bring new skills from their migration experience. Some programmes facilitate the return of professional migrants with special skills to their countries of origin in order to support economic development. An example is the United Nations Development Programme–operated TOKTEN (Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals) project, which supports temporary return to the country of origin.[91]

Returning migrants often have to renegotiate their position within the household and community. Long-term migrants may not wish to resume their traditional work and prefer to engage in different activities that earn better income or bring higher status. Men tend to resume their decision-making position in the household. Women migrants are generally less likely to fit easily back into their former roles. They may be more inclined to challenge the established gender roles and prevailing customs in the family. This can create strong conflicts, leading to domestic violence or women's re-migration.

Although immigration policies make circulation of migrants difficult, the pressure to leave again tends to be strong when the money sent home by a female migrant has been used differently than anticipated (spent rather than saved or invested). This leaves neither savings nor an economic base for the future, which for single women can diminish their prospects of getting married or caring for economic dependants. However, if returning female migrants have accumulated income, they may have the opportunity to set up a business in their home village, such as microenterprises or trading activities, which may elevate their social status and allow them to serve as role models for other rural women.

THE IMPACT OF REMITTANCES

Globally, money sent home by migrants increased from US$ 102 billion in 1995 to an estimated US$ 232 billion in 2005.[92] In general, migration increases remittances to rural areas and strengthens market linkages between rural and urban areas. Although remittances from migrants have the potential to improve the quality of life of rural households, their long-term impact and importance for sustaining rural life differ from context to context.

One country where female migrant income seems to be especially important to rural livelihoods is Bangladesh. A study of Bangladeshi female garment workers found that these workers provide about 46 per cent of their families' income and, according to a 1997 survey, about 23 per cent of unmarried garment workers were the main earners in their families.[93] Often this money is used for permanent improvements in the livelihood of the rural household or extended families, for example through the construction of improved housing.

The effect of remittances on rural areas depends on who controls such income and the way in which it is spent. Sometimes women left behind determine how the money is to be spent; in other cases, the male migrant or other male family members in the rural community make these decisions. The distinction is important, since there is a tendency for income controlled by women to be invested in the household and its members, rather than spent on consumer items.[94]

Remittances from men tend to arrive less regularly than those of women, and men take a larger share of their earnings for their own personal use (alcohol, cigarettes or a second family) and to buy consumer items (such as radios, bicycles and cars), even in instances when their income may be needed for household survival. By contrast, women are more likely to send money home for investment in productive inputs (such as cattle or fertilizers). However, the gender-specific differences in remittances behaviour should not be overgeneralized, as they are influenced by sociocultural factors in different countries.[95]

THE IMPACT OF REMITTANCES FROM FILIPINO WOMEN

A recent study by the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) investigated the impact of migration and remittances on gender equality in the case of Filipino women who have migrated to Italy. The employment opportunities abroad have made rural Filipino migrants important agents of change in their rural communities. The remittances from these women migrants are critical for the access of many rural households to food, clothing, health care, education and other subsistence items. Remittances have also provided the capital required to purchase landholdings. Findings from the study demonstrated that remittances have played a positive role in enhancing gender equality in rural areas in the Philippines. The value of the remittances has contributed to an increase in the status of women at the household and community levels. Some women have used the remittances to shift from unpaid subsistence agricultural work to the management of small businesses. The investment of remittances in the education of children, including girls, has also contributed to social advancement and empowerment of women.

Source: **United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Filipino Women's Council (2008), *Gender, Remittances and Development: The Case of Filipino Migration to Italy* (Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic: INSTRAW).**

A study of women migrating from the Dominican Republic to Spain illustrates how women shifted from sending remittances to their husbands to sending them to other women, such as mothers or sisters, because the latter complied better with the intended use of the money for basic goods and investment in health and education.[96] Women in Suriname tend to turn to other female family members who have migrated to the Netherlands for remittances and cash support when they do not want to (or cannot) rely on the male family members.[97]

Given the importance of women's migration for both countries of origin and countries of destination, it is crucial that gender perspectives are integrated into all policies and programmes on migration in order to empower migrant women and protect and promote their human rights. Governments, international organizations including the United Nations, civil society and the private sector should improve the protection of migrant women's rights, and their safety and security, in particular through steps to protect them from labour abuses, sexual exploitation, trafficking and other situations of exploitation. This is particularly important for rural women, since lack of information can make them vulnerable to traffickers.

Migration policies need to enhance migrant women's employment opportunities, access to safe housing,

education, language training in the host country, health care and other services. Migrant women need access to education and communication programmes to learn of their rights and responsibilities under international and national laws.

Steps should be taken to reduce the cost of remittance transfers by encouraging competition in the remittance transfer market and by providing financial literacy training to the migrant women who send remittances and to the women who receive remittances.

Critical issues for improving the situation of rural women

A number of elements identified as critical for establishing an enabling environment for gender equality and the empowerment of women are highly relevant for women in rural areas. They include strengthening women's *capabilities*, for example through access to education and health services; increasing their access to and control over *resources and opportunities*, such as land, credit, employment, and migration; enhancing their *agency and leadership* roles, including through increased participation in decision-making; and protecting and promoting their *human rights* and ensuring their *security*, including freedom from violence and the threat of violence.[98]

Strengthening capabilities

Access to basic services, such as health care and education, is a precondition for strengthening the capabilities of rural women and facilitating their empowerment. Gender inequalities in access to these services vary widely between urban and rural areas and across regions and countries.

Health

Goals 5, 6 and 7 of the Millennium Development Goals, on reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, are of particular importance to women living in rural areas. The achievement of these goals would increase women's and girls' well-being and their ability to participate effectively in the rural economy.

The 10-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action revealed a lack of human and financial resources for primary health care in rural and remote areas and gaps in access to primary health care between rural and urban areas.[99] Limited health resources may be largely invested in urban areas, contributing to inadequate services in rural areas,[100] with negative consequences for rural women.

In developing countries, women have a 1 in 61 chance of dying from pregnancy-related causes; the rate is 1 in 15 in sub-Saharan Africa.[101] Rural women's access to reproductive health care is inadequately addressed and maternal mortality remains high in many countries, with the highest rates in sub-Saharan Africa. In every region of the world, the presence of skilled birth attendants is lower in rural than in urban areas. In sub-Saharan Africa, less than 40 per cent of women deliver with access to skilled care, and in South Asia the figure is less than 30 per cent.[102] Most pregnant women in rural areas continue to work while pregnant and resume work soon after delivery. The absence of timely medical care, inadequate diet and heavy workload often result in complicated pregnancies and high maternal mortality rates.[103]

Adolescent girls are vulnerable to unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections and are among those with the highest levels of unmet needs for contraception. Early marriage often leads to early childbearing, with negative health consequences for young women, including obstructed labour and obstetric fistula.

Obstetric fistula—a critical issue for rural women

It is estimated that at least 2 million women in Africa, Asia and the Arab region are living with obstetric fistula as a consequence of prolonged obstructed labour, with some 50,000 to 100,000 new cases developing each year. On the basis of 31 recent country-level needs assessments in 29 countries, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) notes that "the typical fistula patient was young, developed the fistula during her first pregnancy, and lived in a rural area". Fistula has severe physical, economic, social and psychological implications for those afflicted with it. Women with fistula are shunned by their partners, families and communities. They live in near-complete social isolation with no opportunities for financial security and are especially vulnerable to malnutrition and violence. Women who remain untreated may also face premature death from frequent infection and kidney failure.

A number of factors play a role in the persistence of fistula. These include endemic poverty, early childbearing, the lack of skilled attendants at birth, inadequate emergency obstetric services and the lack of transportation facilities to reach such services. In addition, there is limited awareness about repair possibilities, and the care provided is inadequate because of a lack of awareness at the policy level, poor integration of services and a shortage of trained providers for fistula care.

Strategies for the eradication of fistula include promoting legislation and policies to reduce maternal mortality and morbidity; raising awareness on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights; addressing underlying sociocultural factors; and strengthening the capacity of health systems to provide skilled maternity care and to manage obstetric fistula effectively and sensitively, particularly in underserved rural areas.

***Source*: D. Jones (2007), *Living Testimony, Obstetric Fistula and Inequities in Maternal Health* (Family Care International (FCI) in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)).**

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is a critical problem for rural women, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. HIV/AIDS affects the gender-specific division of labour in the family and the community, threatens household food security, and has a negative impact on household resources for education and health care. The illness and death of family members intensify the workload of women and girls and decrease the productivity of the household. The responsibilities for the care of sick family members and the associated costs are further aggravated by poor development of rural social infrastructure.[104]

According to a World Health Organization (WHO) estimate,[105] between 100 million and 140 million girls and women in the world have undergone some form of female genital mutilation in more than 28 countries in Africa and some countries in Asia and the Middle East. Approximately 3 million girls and women are subjected to genital mutilation every year. Place of residence (rural/urban differences) is one variable associated with the prevalence of the practice, together with other factors, such as age, education, religion, ethnicity and household wealth. There is, however, no consistent trend—some countries have higher levels of female genital mutilation in rural areas, while other countries show no significant differences between rural and urban areas.[106]

During the last three decades, partnerships between governments, NGOs and United Nations organizations have strengthened efforts to end female genital mutilation. There is a greater understanding of the practice as a violation of human rights and of its harmful health impacts. Promising experiences include the involvement of highly visible opinion makers and community and religious leaders, as well as approaches that target communities as a whole. Community-based programming initiatives by governments and civil society have been supported by United Nations entities to address the challenge of female genital mutilation. For example, in Egypt, UNICEF collaborated with the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood to support community-based programming in 40 communities that builds the capacity of those communities to abandon the practice. In Kenya, UNFPA supported the local Tsaru Ntomonik Initiative that calls for alternative rites-of-passage ceremonies. The community-based organization serves as a "safe house" for an increasing number of young girls who escape from female genital mutilation.[107]

Approaches to ending female genital mutilation

Several national Governments have adopted laws and devised policies, action plans and interventions to curb the prevalence of the practice. In Uganda, the Child Act prohibits female genital mutilation. In Ghana, practitioners and their supporters can be prosecuted. In Nigeria, the Federal Ministry of Health developed a National Policy and Plan of Action on Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation (2002-2006), which was complemented in September 2007 with the second Action Plan to Combat Violence against Women. Governments have also addressed the issue in reproductive health policies and programmes and in training for health professionals, police, judges and prosecutors.

In some countries, progress has been made through peer educators and the increased involvement of local and religious leaders, men and young people. In Ghana and Nigeria, youth peer educators are trained to work in schools and with out-of-school youth and communities through house-to-house campaigns, sensitizing youth to the dangers of female genital mutilation and the benefits of its eradication.

Advocacy and awareness-raising activities have targeted different levels of government as well as religious leaders and members of parliament. In Yemen, influential stakeholders, including religious

leaders, have been involved in awareness-raising programmes. In Ethiopia and Nigeria, alliances with faith-based organizations have proved to be an important strategy to end female genital mutilation.

Source: United Nations (2007c), report of the Secretary-General on ending female genital mutilation (New York: United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women, fifty-second session (E/CN.6/2008/3)).

Gender perspectives must also be taken into account in other areas affecting the health and well-being of women and girls in rural areas, such as environmental hazards. For example, about one half of the world's population relies on biomass and coal as the primary source of domestic energy for cooking and heating. The lack of clean fuels has a direct impact on rural populations, with indoor air pollution causing an estimated 1.6 million deaths per year, mostly of women and children.[108] Incidence and mortality rates for malaria are very high among pregnant women. Gender norms may affect malaria prevention and treatment, as illustrated by sleeping and work patterns, use of bednets, and decisions about which family members receive medicines and medical care.[109]

In some contexts, the effects of economic liberalization have intensified women's reproductive work in their communities. For example, decreases in social service provision by the State and privatization of common property resources have meant that household work, such as water and wood collection, and caring for the sick and older household members have become more time-consuming, with negative consequences for women's health and well-being.[110]

To ensure that women and girls living in rural areas can enjoy their right to the highest attainable standard of health, governments and development partners, including civil society, need to develop gender-sensitive health-care systems and social services and ensure rural women's access to information and services throughout the life cycle. The training curricula of health workers in rural areas should include comprehensive, mandatory, gender-sensitive courses on women's health and human rights.

The following box provides an example of a good-practice health intervention that is designed to promote all aspects of well-being, including sexual and reproductive health in particular.

Rural Women's Social Education Centre: an initiative from rural India

The Rural Women's Social Education Centre (RUWSEC) in Tamil Nadu, India, is run by a grassroots women's organization that primarily works in the area of the sexual and reproductive health rights of rural women. RUWSEC was formed by 12 Dalit, or "low-caste", women from different villages in partnership with local civil society members. The organization aims to expand women's awareness and health-seeking behaviour, and the commitment and ability of the health-care system to meet women's health needs.

Expanding women's awareness: Women are mobilized into small groups at regular meetings in their hamlets that provide women a safe space to discuss their health problems and other issues in relation to their well-being, including sexual and reproductive health and domestic violence. Women are taught to analyse their status as women, wage workers and Dalits and are encouraged to question the disempowering intersection of caste, class and gender in their lives. The organization has also conducted training sessions for men and boys in order to bring about a transformation in gender relations in the community.

Transforming women's health-seeking behaviours: RUWSEC encourages women to use traditional knowledge to initiate self-care at home and to seek attention from community health workers. RUWSEC has established a clinic to provide reproductive health services to local women. Data collected between 1981 and 1999 demonstrate a rise in institutional deliveries and voluntary use of contraception, in addition to a decline in miscarriages and stillbirths.

Influencing the health system's commitment and ability to meet women's health needs: RUWSEC has partnered with local leaders and health workers to provide reproductive and sexual health services to rural women. In a recent initiative, a group of local government women leaders were trained on women's health issues to increase their involvement in monitoring local health providers.

Source: P. Balasubramanian and T. K. Sundari Ravindran (2007), "Rural women take reproductive matters into their own hands", *ARROWs for Change: Women's, Gender and Rights Perspectives in Health Policies and Programmes*, vol. 13, No. 1 (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Center for Women (ARROW)).

Maternal mortality and related morbidities must be reduced through effective strategies that ensure access to affordable, comprehensive, quality maternal health-care services, including skilled birth attendants and emergency obstetric care, as well as prenatal and postnatal care. National legislation and policies need to be developed and implemented to eradicate customary or traditional practices detrimental to the health of women and girls, particularly female genital mutilation. Context-specific approaches are required to take into account ethnic and socio-economic differences among women in rural areas.

Policies, strategies and programmes on HIV/AIDS need to ensure the full integration of gender perspectives, including women's full access to prevention, treatment and care in rural areas. Men and boys must be reached with information to encourage their more active involvement in prevention and caregiving.

Critical factors contributing to women's health also include improved rural infrastructure, the transfer of appropriate technologies for safe water, sanitation and waste management in rural areas, and the development of safe and affordable energy sources, which would reduce dependence on traditional fuel sources for cooking and heating.

EDUCATION

Data from 2000 indicated that about 113 million children of primary school age were not in school, 97 per cent of them lived in developing countries, and three fifths of them were girls.[111] Gender inequalities in access to education are prevalent in the rural areas of low-income countries. Rural areas account for 82 per cent of children who are not in primary school in developing countries, as a result of factors including the need for their labour, the low levels of education of their parents and lack of access to quality schooling.[112]

About 64 per cent of all illiterate adults in the world are women; and only 77 per cent of girls/women over the age of 15 are literate, as compared to 87 per cent of men.[113] The situation varies considerably between countries and regions; the percentage of illiterate women and girls ranges from 92 per cent in the Niger to less than 1 per cent in Barbados and Tajikistan. In some countries, such as Jamaica, Lesotho, Qatar and Uruguay, a higher proportion of women than men are literate.[114]

A variety of factors account for the unequal access to education and the lower levels of educational attainment of women and girls in rural areas. These include issues relating to security, such as the distance between home and school; the lack of transport, which may make it dangerous for girls to travel to school; and insufficient safety in schools, including the lack of such facilities as latrines. The costs of schooling, in terms of fees, uniforms and books, and low earning opportunities reduce the incentives for sending girls to school. The lack of female teachers and curricula that are geared towards male needs and interests and/or perpetuate gender stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes and behaviours may make school unattractive and irrelevant to girls and their families. Policies that prohibit pregnant or married adolescent girls from attending school further reduce girls' opportunities. Marriage systems that require the bride to reside with her husband's family may reduce the incentive to invest in the education of daughters.

The importance of girls' labour often means that families are not prepared to lose this labour input by sending girls to school. Sustaining livelihoods through diversification places increased demands on women's time, causing them to rely increasingly on the labour of girls. This may jeopardize educational opportunities for girls, or even result in the complete withdrawal of girls from school. Inequalities in education and skills acquisition explain, in part, why women benefit less than men from new economic opportunities and also help explain the high number of poor women.[115]

There are both equality and efficiency reasons for removing the gender bias in access to education and training. Studies in many countries have shown that education for girls is one of the most effective ways of reducing poverty. Female education, especially post-primary education, is associated with improved child vaccination rates, health care and nutrition, reduced fertility rates, and increased female productivity in economic activities.[116]

Both formal and non-formal education can play a critical role in the achievement of poverty eradication. Women and girls in rural areas, particularly those who are dropouts and living in poverty, need to have access to non-formal education, such as adult literacy classes and livelihood skills programmes, to improve their livelihoods and enable them to participate in decision-making processes at the household and community levels. Older women are often unable to attend literacy and other training classes because of their heavy workloads.[117]

A number of steps have been identified as critical for improving educational opportunities for girls and achieving equality in enrolment and completion of schooling at primary and other educational levels. These include making education affordable, for example by making primary education free and compulsory, reducing fees to expand girls' access to secondary and higher levels of education, and providing financial incentives for sending girls to school. Initiatives to improve safety for girls in schools include building schools close to girls' homes,

providing appropriate sanitation and recreational facilities as well as boarding facilities, securing safe routes to and from school and providing transport. Steps to increase the enrolment and retention of girls in schools and to ensure relevant high-quality education for girls include training more women teachers and making curricula and textbooks gender-sensitive.

Increasing girls' ability to attend school and extracurricular activities also requires investments in public infrastructure projects and quality public services, such as transport, water, sanitation and sustainable energy, in order to reduce the amount of time girls spend on everyday routine household maintenance tasks. At the same time, efforts need to be made to change attitudes that reinforce the gender division of labour.

In addition to increasing the access of women and girls to formal education, the specific educational and skills development needs of rural women need to be addressed, particularly in the following areas: entrepreneurship—including financing, management and marketing, and farm and household management; off-farm employment opportunities; and nutrition and health, literacy and leadership. All training programmes need to take into account the specific constraints faced by rural women, including in relation to time and transport.

Access to and control over resources and opportunities

The capacity of rural women to take advantage of new economic opportunities and improve their well-being is influenced by their access to productive resources. There is extensive evidence that access to and control over resources for women in rural areas is mediated by local sociocultural, political and economic factors that often result in gender inequalities.

Land

Most households in rural areas still depend on land and natural resources for their basic subsistence. Access to arable land is essential for improving agricultural productivity and ensuring food security. Without secure land rights, farmers have little or no access to credit, rural organizations, irrigation systems and other agricultural inputs and services. Ownership of land is also important for social status. In 2002, 815 million hungry people lived in the developing world, with a concentration in rural areas among the landless or among farmers with plots too small to provide for their needs.[118]

International attention to women's property and inheritance rights has been growing over the past decade. The Millennium Project's Task Force 3 on Primary Education and Gender Equality highlighted progress on property rights for women as one of the key strategies to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.[119] There is increasing recognition that food security and family well-being are dependent on protecting or enhancing women's rights to land.[120]

Documented landownership or land-use rights can be critical for women in rural areas. Joint titling increases their protection in cases of abandonment, separation, divorce or death of spouses. Recent research suggests that property ownership increases their bargaining power within the household and their status as citizens in the community, and may protect them from domestic violence.[121]

Globally, however, women own very little agricultural land, although they produce about half of the world's food. Customary practices and laws in many countries limit women's acquisition of and access to land and, as a result, also constrain their effective participation in decisions at the family and community levels on critical matters related to agriculture.

A review by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) pointed out that women's right to land may be curtailed by de jure direct discrimination. For example, family law provisions may restrict the legal capacity of married women, or formal inheritance rights may exclude women. Indirect discrimination may also limit women's rights. An agrarian reform initiative may refer solely to male-dominated categories, such as permanent agricultural workers. Women's rights can also be undermined by the interactions of customary and statutory law. Even if there is no formal discrimination, women's rights to land may be restricted in practice. For example, women may lack the education to advocate for their rights, or socio-economic factors may pressure women to renounce land rights in favour of male relatives.[122]

A joint study by FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the International Land Coalition (ILC) assessed the status of compliance of a number of States parties with article 14 on rural women and other related articles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, especially with regard to access to land and property, in the context of land or agricultural reforms. The report assessed the extent to which reforms respected women's rights, and the ways by which women's access to land and property, inheritance and legal support was ensured. The study found that in all the countries reviewed women and men had unequal rights to land.[123]

Since the 1980s, titling programmes of Governments and international agencies have promoted the privatization

of customary land and the formalization of land rights as a means to protect access to and control of land and enhance access to credit, agricultural resources and services. Titling programmes do not normally target women. While considered "gender-neutral", in practice many such programmes are gender-biased for a number of reasons. First, laws regulating formal adjudication and registration of property rights usually do not give attention to gender equality, thereby leading to de facto gender bias in application. Second, laws relating to property ownership and management (such as inheritance and contract or tenancy laws) tend to grant title for family/household property (land or housing) to just one person in the family, usually the "head of household", who in the majority of cases is male. Third, other legislation, such as family law, has direct influence on property rights, which can lead to de facto gender bias.

Women's customary rights to land (access or use rights, for example) are not legally recognized, and women may run the risk of losing those rights in practice in titling programmes. As land becomes a marketable asset, family and community members, who in the past may have respected a woman's access rights to land, may ignore or violate those rights. This is particularly the case with widowed and divorced women. Women may thus be unable to claim any ownership rights during the transition to private property regimes, and may also lose their former user rights under the customary regime, making them landless. This has detrimental impacts, since customary rights to land and other natural resources are critical for poor women to be able to engage in and benefit from agricultural, livestock and forest-based production.

Even where legal reform has been cognizant of the needs, priorities and rights of women, the agencies and processes associated with implementation may not be gender-responsive, particularly in contexts where women are not recognized as full and equal participants in the economy. The staff of titling programmes and other land reform programmes are often not gender-sensitive and do not view women as legitimate clients for their activities. Women themselves often lack the skills and confidence to approach institutions that have traditionally been the domain of men.[24]

Increased gender-sensitive research and collection of sex-disaggregated data on the diverse trends relating to acquisition, inheritance and access to land and property throughout the world are needed to better understand the constraints women face and devise effective strategies to address them.

National legislation and policies must be developed or revised to ensure women's equal access to land and property and remove discriminatory practices. A stronger emphasis must be placed on enforcement of such legislation and the establishment of relevant mechanisms at local levels. Governments should carry out gender-sensitive land reform processes. Gender sensitization training must be provided to all cadres of staff working on land reform.

Access to credit and other rural finance services should be improved in order to strengthen women's potential to purchase land, property and other assets needed for agricultural production.

Water and sanitation

Water is an important productive resource, essential for health, domestic hygiene, and care for children, older persons and the sick, as well as for crop production and livestock. In the changing rural economy, water management is an increasingly important issue. Growing populations, urbanization, agricultural intensification and climate change contribute to greater scarcity of, and competition for, water resources. Investments in water and sanitation contribute to economic growth, sustainable development, improved health and well-being and poverty reduction. Goal 7 of the Millennium Development Goals, on environmental sustainability, includes a target to "halve by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation".

Since women play a central role in the provision and management of water, access to clean, reliable sources of water has a marked effect on the amount of time women and girls have for other activities. HIV/AIDS and other diseases can significantly increase household needs for water to nurse the sick.

The following box illustrates how water provision that improves women's access to clean, reliable sources of water can have a positive impact on rural women and their families and communities.

The water supply programme for rural population in Morocco (PAGER)

The Water Supply Programme for Rural Population (PAGER) project was introduced in Morocco in 1995. PAGER follows a decentralized model of water provision, whereby local authorities work in partnership with community organizations to secure water for the communities. Since PAGER's inception, the programme has expanded access to clean water to 4 million people, increasing rural

coverage to 50 per cent in the last decade. Besides reducing the time burden for women, provision of water has had strong multiplier effects. For example, rural primary school attendance among girls increased from 30 to 51 per cent between 1999 and 2003. There have also been improvements in public health and sanitation. The focus on water provision has been a catalyst for wider social change. The creation of water user associations, for example, has opened up opportunities for the involvement of rural women in community development.

Source: **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2006), *Human Development Report 2006: Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty and the Global Water Crisis* (New York: United Nations).**

Despite some progress, rural areas continue, however, to have inadequate access to safe water and sanitation. In developing countries, only 31 per cent of the rural population have access to safe water and basic sanitation, compared with 73 per cent of the urban population.[125] Urban-rural disparities are particularly great in sub-Saharan Africa, where only 45 per cent of the rural population have access to improved water resources, compared with 83 per cent of the urban population.

Provision of adequate sanitation has not kept pace with water supply improvements.[126] In the absence of sanitation facilities, preventable waterborne diseases, such as diarrhoea, cholera, typhoid and other parasitic infections, claim more than 2.2 million lives each year. Other diseases linked to poor sanitation, such as roundworm, whipworm, Guinea worm and schistosomiasis, are prevalent among school-aged children.[127]

Research has shown that provision of sanitation facilities and hygiene education in schools can deliver many beneficial effects. For example, separate sanitation facilities for girls reduce the risk of sexual harassment and violence in schools, and as a consequence can increase enrolment and retention of girls.[128]

Irrigated agriculture provides some 40 per cent of the world's food and consumes 75 per cent of the world's freshwater resources.[129] Irrigation increases agricultural productivity in land under cultivation, enables farmers to grow several crops per year, and regulates the flow of water. Because it increases output, access to irrigation increases household food security and household income. Investment in irrigation infrastructure and water distribution systems is, however, low in many developing countries.

Equitable and secure access to water for irrigation requires not only measures to solve technical problems, but also strategies to address legal rights, control of resources, access to regulatory institutions and the impacts of socio-cultural norms and relations.[130] Existing water rights regimes often exclude and marginalize rural women and thus constrain their ability to use water resources optimally in their farming activities.[131] Many small farmers, including women, have limited access to existing irrigation and water distribution infrastructure. They are often not involved in the technical management and planning of water and irrigation use, and their interests are therefore ignored or marginalized. Large-scale, influential farmers may get priority access to available water before it reaches the less influential farmers. Women farmers, who lack the necessary power in the local irrigators' committees and connections with the water authorities, may find themselves confined to night-time irrigation, which exposes them to risks of violence.[132]

Gender perspectives should be fully incorporated into all policies, strategies and programmes related to access to domestic water supplies, sanitation and irrigation. Gender analysis can, for example, contribute to more effective, equitable and sustainable water management by identifying who needs water, in what amounts, at what times and for what purposes. Gender-sensitive implementation strategies can ensure more effective water management programmes with respect to the quantity, quality and timing of water delivery and improved management and maintenance.

Policies and programmes should always link water supply with sanitation, hygiene education and health issues in order to ensure a positive impact on poverty reduction and sustainable development. The provision of sanitation facilities should take into account the importance of issues of privacy and security for women and girls, for example by providing separate facilities for women and girls in schools and other community facilities.

The role of women in planning, decision-making and management with regard to water resources must be strengthened. Women should be active participants in user groups, such as water point committees or irrigators' associations. Women must also have increased equitable access to all training, technology and credit available for water and sanitation improvements and irrigation.

Energy

The linkages between energy sources, sustainable development, poverty eradication and the quality of the environment are increasingly recognized. Rural populations depend on access to efficient and affordable

energy sources for cooking and heating, lighting, and food production and storage. The most basic energy sources in many rural areas are wood, dung and other biomass fuel. More sophisticated forms include charcoal, coal and kerosene, and electricity and liquefied petroleum gas. Expanded energy sources are needed in rural areas for mechanical power for agriculture, irrigation, transportation, refrigeration, communications, commercial enterprises and community services, including health and education.[133]

Women are disproportionately affected by the lack of modern fuels and power sources for household maintenance and productive enterprises. Poor women in rural areas of developing countries spend many hours collecting and carrying firewood over long distances. With the increasing degradation of natural resources, they spend even more time and physical effort to find and carry home the fuel they need. The time and energy spent on these tasks limit women's ability to engage in other productive and income-generating activities. There are serious health impacts associated with burning traditional biomass fuels, which affect women disproportionately because of their responsibilities for cooking.

Traditional energy policies, for example for electrification, tend to focus on the needs of urban areas. Even when there is a focus on energy for rural areas, the needs and priorities of women may not be taken into account. The focus on expanding the electrical grid in rural areas, for example, may not always provide appropriate solutions for households, health clinics, grain milling machines and small enterprises.[134]

Since women's work is often not recognized and counted, their energy needs may be ignored by policymakers and community leaders, and women may not benefit from changes in energy access. Women's low social status also makes it difficult for them to participate in community decision-making. Investments to improve stoves, kitchens and cooking fuels tend to be considered of marginal importance when men make the decisions about household purchases. Women interested in acquiring new energy equipment for their households or microenterprises may lack the capital to buy it, or be unable to obtain the money from their husbands or other sources.

Understanding the gender dimensions of energy policies will increase the potential to address women's energy needs in the household and the community. Gender-sensitive energy policies and programmes can make modern energy services available to women and girls and alleviate such labour-intensive activities as gathering firewood, collecting water, cooking, crop processing and manual farm work. Clean cooking fuels reduce exposure to indoor air pollution; quality lighting allows for home study, evening classes and income-generating activities; street lighting improves women's safety; and affordable energy services support women's enterprises.[135]

The box below illustrates the importance of capacity development on gender equality and energy issues.

Strengthening capacity for gender-sensitive energy policies through networking in Africa

The international network ENERGIA aims to address the gender perspectives of energy policies and to empower poor rural and urban women in the development of sustainable energy. Between 2005 and 2007, ENERGIA implemented the programme "Turning information into empowerment: strengthening gender and energy networking in Africa" in 18 sub-Saharan countries. With the goal of raising awareness and creating knowledge and skills, the programme focused on strengthening human and institutional capacity for integrating gender perspectives into energy access in Africa. It trained energy experts on gender equality and energy issues and provided training of trainers from 18 countries.

The programme also undertook gender audits of energy policies in Botswana, Kenya and Senegal. The audits provided in-depth analysis of energy planning, budgets, and the institutional capacity of ministries to implement gender mainstreaming strategies and build on the linkages between gender equality issues, energy and poverty reduction and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

The programme led to changes in institutional policies and action. For example, members of the Botswana Gender and Energy Network supported the Botswana Power Corporation and the United Nations Development Programme in integrating gender issues into the Renewable Energy Rural Electrification Programme. Staff from the Ministry of Energy in Kenya began mainstreaming gender perspectives into Kenya's National Rural Electrification Master's degree. In Ghana, the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Environment created a gender desk, which will be responsible for gender and environment issues.

Source: **International Network on Gender and Sustainable Energy (2007), *ENERGIA News: Newsletter of the Network for Gender and Sustainable Energy*, vol. 10, issue 1 (Netherlands: Energia Secretariat). Available from: *http://www.energia.org/resources/newsletter/pdf/en-102007.pdf***

Gender perspectives should be incorporated into all energy needs assessments, policies, strategies and programmes. Gender analysis should inform all investments in energy infrastructure in order to ensure that the specific needs and priorities of women are addressed. Training in gender mainstreaming should be provided to all professional cadres working with rural energy.

Women in rural areas should be provided with capacity-building in order to enable them to participate fully and effectively in energy decision-making processes at the household and community levels. Women's access to credit should be expanded to assist them in meeting their energy needs.

FINANCIAL SERVICES, INCLUDING CREDIT

Access to credit and other financial services can help rural populations to expand their economic opportunities and reduce poverty. Credit enables producers to sustain, initiate or expand production and earnings in two ways. First, short-term credit enables the purchase of such inputs as improved seeds, fertilizers, insecticides and herbicides or the hiring of paid labour, with repayments often made post-harvest. Second, long-term credit enables the purchase of appropriate technology, such as labour-saving tools, or facilitates the establishment of enterprises, such as small-scale dairy, poultry or tree crop activities.

To be effective, however, microcredit has to be part of a comprehensive rural development policy framework that addresses property rights, access to natural resources, access to markets, extension services, new technologies, and viable and sustainable rural financial systems. In addition to credit, the provision of safe and flexible saving products, secure transfer facilities and insurance services are also important.[136]

Producers with limited resources, especially women, receive only a small share of formal agricultural credit even in countries where they are major producers. As land is the major asset used as collateral to obtain rural credit, women have limited access to credit facilities. Estimates indicate that only 10 per cent of agricultural credit is extended to women.[137] Some formal lending institutions believe that married women loan-takers are a greater risk than men, because if marriages are dissolved, the bank will have problems recovering the loan.

Women's lack of access to formal credit means that they rely heavily on the unregulated informal sector to meet their needs. Although the informal financial sector can play a major and dynamic role in promoting development, it can often, for example in the case of traditional moneylenders, be exploitative of poor producers.[138]

The withdrawal of government credit support in rural areas and the increased liberalization and privatization of the financial sector in many developing countries mean that many farmers find it increasingly difficult to access credit. Farmers may lack knowledge on how to apply for credit, and there may be strong mutual distrust between banking institutions and agricultural producers. These difficulties are exacerbated for women, who are generally less prepared for the new economic conditions and less inclined to take risks.[139]

In recent years, microcredit interventions have received considerable attention as a means to reduce poverty and empower women, with South Asia being one of the most active regions in this respect. The results, however, have been mixed. Some studies have shown that the bargaining power of women within the household was strengthened by access to credit and control over income and assets. At the same time, some microcredit schemes have been criticized for exaggerated claims of benefits and achievements and for merely helping the poor to survive, rather than addressing the structural causes of poverty and inequality. Some researchers have argued that loans to women and the pressure to repay have led to stress within households and to higher levels of domestic violence.[140]

Microcredit interventions remain, however, an effective tool for poverty reduction. Evidence suggests that lending to women is more cost-effective when compared to men, as women are more reliable credit-takers.[141] Furthermore, women's income is consistently utilized for expenditures that are beneficial to the entire family and the wider community. For example, research findings from a number of countries demonstrate that women spend much of their income on household well-being, including children's education and their own health.[142]

Many successful microcredit schemes have specifically focused on reaching rural women. A good-practice example is the microfinance institution of the Country Women's Association of Nigeria, African Traditional Responsive Banking (ATRB). ATRB seeks to empower rural women, who are encouraged to pool their savings and contribute to the bank. Based on their contribution, these women become shareholders in the bank. ATRB has a community-based institutional structure, and the involvement of local leaders encourages timely repayment of loans. Besides individual loans, group loans are also extended to support community-based enterprises.[143]

Savings-led microcredit schemes were devised to tap into savings, a relatively underutilized and sustainable source of capital, which could benefit poor households.

These schemes mobilize member savings as a potential source of capital, in contrast to the grant funding and loans from donors and capital markets used by most microcredit programmes. The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) in India, for example, has been successful in its savings-led approach.[144] The following box illustrates the experiences of a savings-led project.

SAVINGS-LED MICROFINANCE SCHEMES

The women's empowerment programme WORTH is an innovative savings-led microfinance programme that does not solely depend on outside credit, but aims to tap into savings within the community. WORTH has worked in challenging environments as diverse as Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Liberia and Nepal.

Working through women's groups and local NGOs that are already active in the community, WORTH fosters grass-roots development, enhances family income, and encourages local control of resources. The programme teaches women basic literacy, numeracy and savings skills, enabling them to manage a village bank (with their own savings constituting the loan capital). The programme also encourages networking and knowledge sharing and conducts training workshops that provide an important forum for problem-solving, exchange and interaction.

The programme introduces literacy through group learning; enables women to save through simple, practical village banking; encourages women to borrow from their savings to develop microenterprises; enables women to generate income from their group lending, with interest on loans remaining within the group to grow the loan fund and be shared out as dividends; gives women the experience and skills to manage their groups; and trains women in problem-solving and advocacy to tackle challenges facing families and communities, including gender-based violence, water and property rights, and HIV/AIDS, among others.

Since the programme is low-cost, replication by the women themselves is possible. For example, the WORTH programme in Nepal, which reached 125,000 participants, required less than US$ 42 per woman. More recent initiatives are reducing costs even further.

Source: **M. Pickens, M. Thavy and K. Keang (2004), *Savings-led and Self-help Microfinance in Cambodia: Lessons Learned and Best Practices* (Cambodia: Pact Cambodia's WORTH Initiative).**

To support women's access to financial resources, discriminatory lending practices should be removed and legal frameworks adopted or revised to redress biases in financial institutions that work against women's access to financial services.

Financial services available to women must be expanded including—but not restricted to—the informal sector. Financial institutions must be encouraged to undertake research on and develop innovative financial instruments for improved provision of services to women with reduced costs. Greater attention needs to be given to effective saving schemes for rural women. To ensure that microfinance programmes effectively support rural women, they must include training on financial management, project management and marketing.

EXTENSION SERVICES

Extension services play a crucial role in furthering the access of farmers to productive resources, assets and new technologies and in linking them to research and planning institutions. Extension personnel should identify difficulties; provide technical advice and training; and provide relevant inputs, such as fertilizer and seeds.

Agricultural extension programmes in many developing countries tend to be directed primarily to landowners. In many instances, they focus on large, influential farmers and neglect small farmers, who have less education and political power.[145] Since women and men are responsible for different crops and livestock, and carry out different tasks and activities, their extension needs also differ. Women often lack access to land, and as a result extension services bypass them. Extension personnel are usually male, low-paid and poorly trained, and they are often ill-equipped to provide technical help in a gender-sensitive manner. They neglect women farmers, in spite of their demonstrated contributions to agriculture and rural development.[146]

Given the critical role of extension services in the agricultural sector, such neglect has a significant negative impact on rural women's farming activities and on the women's ability to undertake improvements, such as adoption of new types of crops, including non-traditional exports. They lack critical information regarding new seeds, fertilizers and technological advances and miss out on important opportunities for training and credit. The box on page 33 describes the findings of a study that reviewed the effectiveness of extension services for women in south-western Nigeria.

Gender perspectives should be integrated into the extension curricula and teacher training materials. Extension officers, both men and women, should be trained

in gender-sensitive delivery of extension services in order to ensure that the services reach both women and men farmers.

Women and extension services in south-western Nigeria

A study in Nigeria that reviewed the organization and management of extension services to rural women in south-western Nigeria revealed that only 55.8 per cent of the female respondents were aware of the presence of village extension agents, and only about one third of these had regular contacts with these agents. The study highlighted the need for gender awareness training for both male and female extension agents in order to improve the delivery of extension services to women farmers. Time constraints on women farmers, due to their multiple roles, reduced their access to extension services. Women's restricted mobility, due to poor transportation systems in the rural areas, also limited their levels of participation in agricultural extension activities. After extension agents and spouses, radio was ranked as the most important source of information on agriculture. The research also revealed that two main reasons for low levels of adoption of innovations among their clientele were lack of labour and essential inputs.

Source: **B. Adetoun (2003), "Organization and management of extension services for women farmers in south-western Nigeria: policy reforms and extension services for women farmers in Nigeria" (Washington, D.C.: Global Development Network).**

Measures should be taken at agricultural education institutions to increase female student enrolment, with the goal of increasing the number of women extension workers and the representation of women in agricultural and rural development institutions.

Research and technology

Agricultural research and technological innovations can support the rural poor in overcoming poverty and participating in the global economy. Advances in agriculture have included the development of new crop varieties and chemical inputs, as well as innovations in agricultural machinery and farm practices. Research and new technology have led to an increase in food production.[147] However, effective implementation of technological advances requires basic infrastructure, such as a network of roads, reliable supplies of electricity and sound telecommunications networks.

The promotion of technology in agriculture in developing countries has often been carried out without consideration of local conditions or availability of resources, and without consultation with the local people, particularly rural women.[148] Successful agricultural technologies are usually appropriated by large landowners who already have knowledge, capital and institutional connections. Rural women generally lack those advantages and tend to be marginalized.

Women farmers are reluctant to accept technological advances when the risks, particularly in terms of the impact on household food security, are not known or are not adequately covered by risk-management strategies. Technologies developed for rural areas of developing countries have not always been adapted to local farming conditions and thus have sometimes had adverse side effects. This has heightened the distrust of exogenous technology. There are instances of family incomes falling, sometimes to the detriment of household survival, when innovations were introduced. From a rural woman's perspective, family survival is the most important consideration. If risk-averse rural women are to take up new technologies and crops, the possibility of crop failure must be minimal.[149]

The problem of inappropriate and high-risk technology is exacerbated by the fact that rural women are generally not involved in selecting agricultural research topics, and the research agenda does not focus on their needs. They tend to be interested in technology that is suitable for small farmers or that is focused on staple foods, such as labour-saving devices.[150] The needs and priorities of rural women need to be systematically taken into consideration in all research and technology development. To make research and technology development more gender-sensitive, women need to be consulted on their specific needs for improvements as well as on the implications of proposed new technologies, including risk elements.

Further research is needed on labour-saving devices at the household level, such as fuel-efficient stoves and food-processing equipment, which will increase the amount of time women have for productive and reproductive activities, as well as for leisure and self-improvement.

Information and communications technologies

Access to information, including through new information and communications technologies (ICT), is increasingly important in the changing rural economy. An analysis conducted by FAO found that poverty among

rural women is related to their exclusion from information flows, communication processes and decision-making.[151] In the 2005 World Summit on the Information Society, Member States recognized the gender digital divide and reaffirmed the international commitment to women's empowerment, without, however, specifically mentioning rural women.[152]

Rural women face multiple constraints that hinder them from accessing and using ICT. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), limited infrastructure and problems of affordability, education and training impede rural women from accessing relevant technologies in Africa.[153] Research from Indonesia indicates that even though improvements have been made in access to and deployment of communications technologies, infrastructure in rural areas is still limited, existing services are often too expensive for rural women, and information relevant to their realities is very limited. Women continue to lag behind in accessing these technologies because of social, cultural, economic and educational barriers.[154]

Women in very poor rural households do not have the surplus income to spend on ICT and are less likely to own such devices as a mobile phone or a radio.[155] The geographical location of ICT facilities, gender-blind ICT infrastructure and social and cultural norms can also act as gender-specific constraints.[156] When ICT facilities do exist in rural areas, they tend to become men-only spaces that do not encourage women's access to these technologies.[157] Women's heavy domestic workload leaves them little leisure time and ICT centres may not be available during the hours that women are free or in locations that are easily accessible and safe for women.[158] Another barrier is the lack of ICT information in local languages.[159]

ICT are an integral tool for strengthening the capabilities of rural women. The strategic use of ICT expands women's access to health care and educational services as well as encourages their greater participation in political processes. Most importantly, ICT can be used to generate and enhance opportunities for income generation and economic empowerment of rural women. The following box illustrates the wide-ranging uses and impacts of ICT on rural women in Africa.

Women and ICT: three stories from Africa

In Senegal, Sonatel, a local telephone company, and Manobi, a French company, provided cellphones with Web Access Protocol (WAP) to women agricultural producers. This significantly expanded their access to the Internet and helped them obtain information regarding market prices for the sale of their produce and for the inputs for their food-processing activities. Women participating in the project appreciated the economic benefits of the technology.

In Zimbabwe, rural women are increasingly accessing radio because of the Development through Radio project. The project runs 52 women's radio listening clubs and encourages women to participate in the production of programmes based on their developmental needs and priorities. The project has allowed women to pose questions to political officials and the responses have become part of the weekly broadcasts. The programme is being extended to women in Sierra Leone to increase their involvement in civic and political life.

In Uganda, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Population Secretariat and district authorities in Uganda, initiated the RESCUER project to reduce the high maternal mortality rate by improving local care and referral systems. The project combined communications, transport and quality health services. Very-high-frequency (VHF) radios were installed at base stations, health units, referral hospital ambulances and District Medical Officer vehicles. Birth attendants were equipped with walkie-talkies, which built confidence among their patients. Rural health personnel are now able to call and provide medical advice even when there is no transport available.

Source: **United Nations (2005f), *Women 2000: Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women through ICT* (New York: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for the Advancement of Women).**

The gender implications of new technologies must be reflected in national ICT policies, so that the specific needs and priorities of women and girls as consumers and users of information are addressed and their participation in developing and implementing global ICT strategies is ensured.

Innovative ICT initiatives that are expanding technological access for rural women must be scaled up and broadly replicated. The design and operational modalities of all ICT facilities in rural areas should be gender-sensitive

in order to address the constraints women face in relation to location, transport facilities, opening times and security issues, and ensure their active use of such facilities. Efforts should be made to expand the provision of relevant local language content that is easily accessible to rural women with limited reading skills. Rural women should be supported in producing their own locally relevant content. Schools in rural areas should include basic training in ICT, and equitable access of girls and boys should be ensured.

Enhancing women's agency and leadership roles

Women's increased education and labour market participation has not necessarily translated into increased participation in public life, particularly for rural women. They have less free time than men, as they carry out subsistence agriculture for food security and work for wages on the farms of their husbands or other farmers, while at the same time carrying out their critical role in the reproductive economy. The responsibilities women undertake for household maintenance in rural areas not only impede their participation in decision-making processes, but also serve to facilitate men's participation in these processes.[160] Low levels of education among rural women also limit their ability to participate.

According to 2005 data collected by United Cities and Local Governments, women constitute 20.9 per cent of councillors and 9 per cent of mayors at local levels.[161] Governments have taken different measures to increase women's political participation, including the use of constitutional or legislative quotas or voluntary quotas set by political parties; training for women; working with women in office to enhance their capacity to use relevant procedures and rules; and public awareness–raising targeted at women and men.

Some countries have taken initiatives to decentralize decision-making to more local levels, which has included opportunities for women to increase their participation. For example, in India a 1993 constitutional amendment included a measure to reserve one third of seats in panchayats (local governing councils) for women. Similarly, Pakistan's Devolution of Power Plan of 2000 reserved one third of seats for women at all subnational levels.[162]

Women are thus gradually increasing their representation in previously male-dominated bodies in rural areas. Rural women's participation is critical in local councils, trade unions and local governments, as well as in a range of community-based organizations, such as water committees and farmers associations. Women must have access to all formal and informal decision-making processes in order to ensure that their needs and priorities are taken fully into consideration. There are also an increasing number of women's cooperatives and professional bodies through which women can make themselves heard and advocate for decisions that support them or lobby against decisions that will harm their interests. The following box illustrates the situation of women in farmers' organizations in different regions.

The role of women in farmers' organizations

In countries in Central and South America, grassroots acceptance of women's participation is difficult and slow. There is little involvement of rural women in farmers' organizations, and usually only as members. When women are elected to decision-making positions, it is most often as treasurer and secretary.

Some farmers' organizations in Asia and Oceania have drawn up clear guidelines that take into account the interests of rural women and the necessity of improving their representation and participation at all levels of professional organizations. In other countries, however, the situation is less conducive to women's participation. Institutional obstacles include the lack of capacity-building of local administrators, whether men or women, and the need for funds to implement policies and to ensure that gender equality issues are integrated at all levels of professional organizations.

The integration of women into many African farmers' organizations has gained new momentum. Decision-making and managerial responsibilities have been opened up for women, which in turn has resulted in greater attention to the interests of women farmers in the policies and development programmes of these organizations.

Source: **International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) (2000), *Empowering Women in Agriculture: Progress Made since the 1995 Beijing World Conference* (France: IFAP).**

Assessing the impact of women in decision-making processes is complex, given the low level of women's representation, coupled with the relatively short time women have had access to decision-making in most countries. Women are not a homogeneous group, and their actions as decision makers are also influenced by their socio-economic class, race, religion, ethnicity and location.[163]

In a survey of women local leaders in 13 Asian and Pacific countries, women reported that they practised politics in a different way from their male colleagues, including by having: a greater sense of social issues and the well-being and welfare of their communities, with priorities more likely to centre on housing, safety, clean water, sanitation, education, the social implications of policies, health services, childcare, poverty alleviation and community development; a commitment to improving the environment within their communities, by taking into account physical considerations, the quality of life, and environmental sustainability through local government; different priorities, including a willingness to spend time on issues that some men find trivial, such as family issues, dowry problems and violence against women and children; and a focus on change and a preference for a more democratic and transparent approach to governance, to move away from an adversarial and, in some cases, corrupt image of politics.[164]

The Indian experience with reserved seats for women in local municipal bodies illustrates how women's presence and participation can change politics. Recent data show that most states have at least 33 per cent women as a direct consequence of the reservation, with some states exceeding the quota. While initially women councillors were seen as surrogates of male relatives, over time they became leaders in their own right and gained the confidence to act independently. Women as heads of panchayats were found to be more sensitive to women's needs and more supportive of the implementation of programmes benefiting women. Their presence has also made women citizens more likely to take advantage of state services and demand their rights. The experience from India has shown that women councillors have had a direct impact on policy decisions related to local development in terms of infrastructure, housing, schools and health.[165]

The impact of women councillors in India

Studies in two states in India, Rajasthan and West Bengal, found an unambiguous association between the stated priorities of women councillors—drinking water, fuel, health care and roads—and increased levels of spending in these areas. Several studies found that women councillors invested more in the expressed development priorities of women and children, particularly in drinking water infrastructure, housing, schools and health, and that children in these areas were more likely to be immunized and to attend government day-care centres.

Source: **J. Drage (2001), *Women in Local Government in Asia and the Pacific: A Comparative Analysis of Thirteen Countries*, Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors (Bangkok: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific); and United Nations (2007b), report of the Secretary-General on women in development (New York: United Nations (A/62/187)).**

Despite these positive examples, rural women still face considerable obstacles when they attempt to participate in formal decision-making structures. Some of these constraints relate to age, religion and class, and may thus vary by region and by different rural contexts within countries. Common concerns, however, include the time required to meet domestic responsibilities, economic pressures, stereotypical attitudes, limited education or literacy, security issues, and opposition from family and community members.

Consultation with and participation of women and women's groups, including farmers' organizations, in planning, implementation and monitoring rural development and poverty reduction strategies, as well as in national MDG reporting, should be increased. As relevant, quota systems and affirmative action should be utilized to increase the participation of women in decision-making in all areas of rural development. The positive achievements of the use of such affirmative action measures should be broadly disseminated. Capacity-building programmes should be implemented for rural women to strengthen the capabilities and self-confidence required for increased participation in decision-making.

Gender perspectives should be systematically incorporated into all planning, implementation and monitoring processes on rural development and poverty eradication, including in poverty eradication strategy reviews and MDG reporting processes. Gender-responsive budgeting should be implemented in rural areas and women's active participation in these processes promoted.

The broader constraints to women's effective participation in decision-making processes should be addressed, including in relation to education, income and workloads. This will include actions to develop labour-saving technologies and services required for reconciling family and work responsibilities and actions to eliminate gen-

der stereotyping in appointments and elections to bodies of local government or decision-making bodies, such as water committees.

Enhancing rights and security

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women recognizes the specific situation of women in rural areas and calls on States parties to take measures to eliminate discrimination against them. Traditional cultural practices and norms, as well as the physical isolation of rural areas, pose special challenges to rural women's enjoyment of their rights, including their access to basic services, their rights to land, property and inheritance, their access to decent employment and their participation in decision-making within local governance structures. Some groups of women, such as widows, indigenous women and women heading households, are particularly vulnerable and marginalized.

Violence against women

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recognizes in its general recommendation number 19 that violence against women constitutes a form of gender-based discrimination. Violence against women persists in all regions of the world as a pervasive violation of human rights and a major impediment to achieving gender equality. Women in rural areas experience violence within their families and communities. Such violence can be exacerbated during armed conflict and natural disasters.

Violence takes many different forms, including domestic violence, early and forced marriages, lack of access to health care and food, harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, forced prostitution, rape and sexual violence. Women are also exposed to violence in the form of exploitative working conditions in inadequately regulated industries or are trafficked into the sex industry. Violence prevents women from fully contributing and benefiting from development. It restricts their choices and limits their ability to act. A number of risk factors for violence have been identified, some of which are particularly relevant for rural women. They include women's isolation and lack of social support; community attitudes that tolerate and legitimize male violence; and high levels of social and economic disempowerment and poverty.[166]

The under-resourcing of rural areas often makes women's access to services and justice difficult. Research from South Africa illustrates the difficulties women in rural areas face when they seek help with domestic violence. There are few support services for abused women, and large distances to public services create additional problems, for example in relation to childcare. Bus and taxi services are limited or, when they do exist, are not affordable for poor rural women. The police and ambulance services, where these exist, react slowly. Telecommunication services are of poor quality and expensive. Women struggle to pay for basic necessities, travel, accommodation, or the costs of separation or relocation. Staff at rural courts have noted the costs of transporting witnesses from outlying areas to courts as a constraining factor.[167]

Governments and civil society organizations have taken a number of measures to combat violence against women, such as provision of services for women victims of violence, awareness-raising campaigns, and the adoption of specialized laws and procedures. For example, in the Philippines, the Anti-Violence against Women and Their Children Act of 2004 criminalizes acts of physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse in intimate relationships. The law allows courts to issue temporary protection orders and specifies that in rural contexts village officials should provide protection.[168] However, women in rural areas often do not have access to services for victims of violence and to means of redress and protection. The following box provides a good-practice example of community action to combat violence.

The prevention and deterrence of violence against women through popular education

The Cambodian Women's Crisis Centre (CWCC) set up the Prevention and Deterrence of Violence against Women through Popular Education programme that was operational during 1998-1999. The programme aimed at educating and organizing communities and police officers in 18 villages to combat all forms of violence against women. The programme was based on the principle that legislation is not enough, but must be followed by a change in beliefs in order for communities, including local police, to take action.

The project called for the police and community members to take responsibility for the safety of women and girls in their communities. CWCC training sessions informed community members about trafficking, domestic violence and rape. Local policemen received training on Cambodia's Constitution,

penal provisions on battery, assault and rape, laws on trafficking, and the international conventions ratified by Cambodia. Volunteers in each village received further training and continued to work as point persons in coalitions made up of community members, the village chief and police. In addition, five villages made a pact to combat trafficking of girls in their villages.

In reviews of the programme, volunteers, village chiefs and police agreed that there had been a reduction in domestic violence since the training took place. The use of contracts to end violent behaviour and systematic monitoring of results were positive outcomes of the partnership between communities and police to end violence against women.

Source: C. Spindel, E. Levy and M. Connor (2000), ***With an End in Sight: Strategies from the UNIFEM Trust Fund to Eliminate Violence against Women*** (New York: United Nations Development Fund for Women).

Conflict and post-conflict situations

Existing inequalities between women and men and patterns of discrimination against women and girls are exacerbated in armed conflict. During periods of armed conflict and post-conflict reconstruction, gender inequalities worsen and women experience abuse, psychological trauma, loss of family members, displacement and loss of resources disproportionately. Fighting forces, looting and forcible displacement disrupt rural subsistence strategies. The breakdown of marketing structures, the destruction of marketplaces, and the looting and burning of seeds, crops and livestock limit possibilities for agricultural production and trading. Household assets are frequently sold in order to support families during conflict. In rural areas, this can include the sale of crops, seeds, water rights, land, farm animals and equipment.[169]

Patterns of violence against women worsen during conflict. Women are subject to all forms of physical, sexual and psychological violence, including murder, torture, abductions, maiming and mutilation, forced recruitment, rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage, forced prostitution, forced abortion, forced pregnancy and forced sterilization. Sexual violence has been used to degrade and intimidate communities, to drive groups off land and to wilfully spread HIV.[170] Rural women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo were killed because they were believed to be providing support to rival armed groups that the local villagers did not support.[171]

Research indicates a link between high rates of conflict and high rates of HIV. For instance, in Rwanda, infection rates of HIV for rural areas stood at 1 per cent for rural areas and 27 per cent for urban areas in 1992. By 1997, as a consequence of the 1994 genocide, urban and rural infection rates had become nearly equivalent.[172]

Refugee, returnee and internally displaced women and girls suffer human rights abuses throughout their displacement and flight and in camp settings and resettlement. Weakened or destroyed social support structures result in reduced security for women and girls in relation to risks of harassment, violence or exploitation, and to problems in accessing the assistance necessary for survival. Difficulties faced by women and girls are not always identified and addressed in the planning and management of camps, the layout of shelters and facilities, and the distribution of supplies in camps.[173] This also constitutes a denial of their rights.

Women who are excluded from decision-making structures in their communities in peacetime are unlikely to become involved in decisions during conflicts or the peace processes that follow. At the same time, armed conflict and displacement cause gender roles and responsibilities to change, as women and men are forced to assume different roles and responsibilities. Women may become the main breadwinners when men are drafted into armed forces or are killed.

Armed conflict usually results in significant damage to the overall economic infrastructure. Women and men are affected differently by post-conflict economic reform processes because of the differences and inequalities in relation to their position in the economy (across and within sectors and formal and informal economies), access to resources, vocational skills and educational profiles, distribution of domestic responsibilities, and mobility patterns.

The reconstruction of damaged or destroyed social sectors, including health, education and social service institutions, is essential to support the long-term process of social healing and integration.[174] The severe disruption to social networks caused by armed conflict contributes to growing numbers of marginalized groups, including war widows, child-headed households, orphans, the disabled and former child soldiers. Reduction and dismantling of State-financed social services increase pressure on the private sector to undertake these functions, resulting in higher prices or unavailability of services

and greater demands on women to make up for lost services in their homes.

The period of transition after a conflict, however, also provides an opportunity to create a democratic and equal society if the different needs and priorities of women and men are taken into account at all stages. Constitutional and legal reform processes during reconstruction provide opportunities to establish principles of non-discrimination and equality on the basis of sex in all areas, including violence against women, marriage, divorce, custody, property and inheritance rights, and access to economic resources. A gender-sensitive judiciary is critical to remove gender bias within courts in order to enforce the rights of women and address crimes committed against women during the conflict. Legal and other measures can promote women's political participation in elections.[75]

Effective, sustainable measures are needed to end impunity and ensure accountability for violence against women, whether the violence occurs in the family or community, in rural or remote areas, or as a consequence of armed conflict. Governments have a responsibility to act with due diligence to prevent violence against women; to investigate such violence; to prosecute and punish perpetrators; and to provide access to redress for victims.

Governments should develop and implement adequately resourced multisectoral strategies, in close cooperation with civil society organizations, that take into account the specific contexts and challenges faced by women living in remote areas. Local communities should also take responsibility for addressing violence against women more effectively and ensuring women's access to services and redress mechanisms.

Attention to violence against women should be fully integrated into the justice, health, housing and education sectors in order to ensure effective prevention work as well as adequate assistance to women victims/survivors in rural areas in terms of legal, health and social services. Gender-sensitive responses to armed conflict and emergencies require systematic gender analysis to ensure that the needs and priorities of rural women are fully taken into account in the planning and implementation of humanitarian action and reconstruction programmes. Constitutional and legal reforms in post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts need to be based on the principles of gender equality and non-discrimination, including in relation to legal status, property and inheritance rights, access to economic resources and political participation.

Useful links and resources on rural women

WomenWatch

WomenWatch is the United Nations inter-agency portal on gender equality issues. It provides online information on the gender equality work of the entire United Nations system (*http://www.un.org/womenwatch*).

Socio-economic and Gender Analysis Programme, FAO

The Socio-economic and Gender Analysis Programme (SEAGA) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations was established in 1993 to promote gender awareness when meeting development challenges. It aims at incorporating socio-economic and gender equality considerations into development policies, programmes and projects in order to ensure that all development efforts address the needs and priorities of both men and women (*http://www.fao.org/sd/seaga/4_en.htm*).

International Fund for Agricultural Development

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) website provides information on the fund's efforts to mainstream a gender perspective in its work, including in the areas of financial services, markets, technologies, land and other natural resources (*http://www.ifad.org/gender/*).

Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research

The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) is a strategic alliance of countries, international and regional organizations, and private foundations supporting 15 international agricultural centres that mobilize agricultural science to reduce poverty, foster human well-being, promote agricultural growth and protect the environment (*http://www.cgiar.org/index.html*).

Dimitra

The Dimitra project, launched in 1994 in Brussels, Belgium, by the European Commission, with the support of the King Baudouin Foundation, aims at improving the living conditions of rural women. It promotes information exchange and disseminates information on gender equality and rural development, with a focus on Africa and the Middle East (*http://www.fao.org/dimitra*).

ENDNOTES

1 United Nations, 2000b, para. 20.

2 World Bank, 2006.

3 A number of researchers have pointed to the gains from a reduction in gender inequalities, including Saito, Spurling and Mekonnen, 1994; Hill and King, 1993; and Tibaijuka, 1994. See Grown, Gupta and Kes, 2005; and United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 2005.

4 General Assembly resolution 62/136 of 18 December 2007 on improvement of the situation of women in rural areas.

5 The United Nations definition of gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development.

6 United Nations, 1995.

7 United Nations, 2000a.

8 United Nations, 2005a.

9 United Nations, 2000b.

10 United Nations, 2001b.

11 General Assembly resolution 60/1 of 16 September 2005 adopting the 2005 World Summit Outcome.

12 United Nations, 1992.

13 United Nations, 2002a.

14 United Nations, 2002b.

15 The situation of rural women was extensively addressed in the following Secretary-General's reports to the General Assembly: A/40/239 and Add.1, 1985; A/44/516, 1989; A/48/187, 1993; A/50/257/Rev.1, 1995; A/52/326, 1997; A/54/123, 1999; A/56/268, 2001; A/58/167, 2003; A/60/165, 2005; and A/62/202, 2007.

16 General Assembly resolution 62/136 of 18 December 2007 on improvement of the situation of women in rural areas.

17 For the years 2005 to 2007: E/2005/29-E/CN.17/2005/12, E/2006/29(SUPP)-E/CN.17/2006/15(SUPP) and E/2007/29(SUPP)-E/CN.17/2007/15(SUPP).

18 E/2005/43-E/C.19/2005/9, E/2006/43-E/C.19/2006/11 and E/2007/43-E/C.19/2007/12.

19 United Nations, 2004a.

20 General Assembly resolution 61/106 of 13 December 2006.

21 *http://www.ifad.org/sf/strategic_e.pdf*

22 United Nations, 2001c.

23 Wichterich, 2000.

24 Illo, 2001.

25 International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2001.

26 United Nations, 2006b.

27 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2006.

28 United Nations, 2006c.

29 Tempelman and Keita, 2004.

30 Blackden and Wodon, 2006.

31 Wichterich, 2000.

32 Osmani, 2001.

33 United Nations, 2001d.

34 Barrientos and others, 1999.

35 Ibid.

36 United Nations, 1999.

37 Fontana, Joekes and Masika, 1998.

38 Barrientos and others, 1999.

39 Smith and others, 2004.

40 Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000.

41 Illo, 2001.

42 United Nations, 2001c.

43 Ibid.

44 Cotula, 2002.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) is a broad international network of member-based organizations, research and academic institutions and development agencies.

48 International Restructuring Education Network Europe (IRENE), 2002.

49 United Nations, 2006b.

50 United Nations Development Programme, 1998.

51 United Nations Development Programme, 2006.

52 World Bank, 2004.

53 Kabeer, 2003.

54 Bell, 2003.

55 Zuckerman, 2002.

56 United Nations, 2007b.

57 United Nations Development Programme, 2007.

58 Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), 2007.

59 Hansen-Kuhn, 2007.

60 Agarwal, 1992.

61 International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and Farm-Level Applied Research Methods in Eastern and Southern Africa (FARMESA), 1998.

62 Ibid.

63 There are cultural as well as regional differences in defining what constitutes a household and who is the "head of household". Generally speaking, the "head of the household" is perceived as the person responsible for managing the household and providing or controlling the income. Some countries have substituted the concept of "reference person" for household heads in their data collection.

64 The highest percentages are reported for Southern Africa and the Caribbean with 42 per cent and 36 per cent, respectively, and the lowest for Southern Asia, with 9 per cent (United Nations, 2000c).
65 Global Coalition on Women and AIDS, 2005a.
66 UNAIDS and the Interagency Task Team on Gender and HIV/AIDS, 2005.
67 Bishop-Sambrook, 2004.
68 Waldman, 2005.
69 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2004a.
70 Ibid.
71 UNAIDS and the Inter-Agency Task Team on Gender and HIV/AIDS, 2005.
72 Global Coalition on Women and AIDS, 2005b.
73 United Nations, 2006d.
74 United Nations, 2005b.
75 Ibid.
76 United Nations, 2002c.
77 United Nations, 2005b.
78 Ibid.
79 International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2002.
80 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1995b.
81 O'Laughlin, 1997; and Rodenburg, 1997.
82 United Nations, 2005b.
83 Ibid.
84 Beall, Kanji and Tacoli, 1999.
85 United Nations, 2005b.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Ramirez, Dominguez and Morais, 2005.
90 Garcia and Paeiwonski, 2006.
91 United Nations, 2005b.
92 United Nations, 2006d.
93 Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000.
94 Garcia and Paeiwonski, 2006.
95 United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Filipino Women's Council (2008).
96 Ibid.
97 Kromhout, 2000.
98 Grown, Gupta and Kes, 2005.
99 United Nations, 2005a.
100 World Health Organization, 2005.
101 Grown, Gupta and Kes, 2005.
102 United Nations Population Fund, 2005.
103 Vargas-Lundius and Ypeij, 2007.
104 United Nations, 2005c.
105 World Health Organization, 2006.
106 United Nations Children's Fund, 2005; and World Health Organization, 2006.
107 United Nations, 2007c.
108 World Health Organization, 2005.
109 World Health Organization, 2003.
110 Chant, 1994; Kanji, 1991; and Moser, 1996.
111 United Nations, 2004b.
112 United Nations, 2006b.
113 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2000.
114 Population Reference Bureau, 2002.
115 Pearson, 2000.
116 Grown, Gupta and Kes, 2005.
117 Ibid.
118 World Health Organization, 2005.
119 Grown, Gupta and Kes, 2005.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
122 Cotula, 2002.
123 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Fund for Agricultural Development and International Land Coalition, 2004.
124 Lastarria-Cornhiel, 2001.
125 World Health Organization, 2005.
126 United Nations Development Programme, 2006.
127 United Nations, 2006e.
128 Ibid.
129 Gender and Water Alliance, 2003.
130 United Nations, 2005d.
131 Meinzen-Dick and others, 1997.
132 Zwarteveen, 1997.
133 Lambrou and Piana, 2006.
134 Ibid.
135 Modi and others, 2006.
136 United Nations, 2006b.
137 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1997.
138 Aryeetey and Nissanke, 1998.
139 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2000.
140 United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 2005.
141 United Nations, 2001e.
142 Mayoux, 2000.
143 United Nations, 2001f.
144 Pickens, Thavy and Keang, 2004.
145 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1995a.
146 Ibid.
147 United Nations, 2006f.
148 Jazairy, Alamgir and Panuccio, 1992.
149 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1996.
150 Ibid.
151 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2000.
152 United Nations, 2005e.
153 United Nations, 2005f.
154 World Bank, 2005.
155 Gurumurthy, 2004.
156 United Nations, 2005f.
157 Gurumurthy, 2004.
158 Ibid.
159 Comfort, Goje and Funmilola, 2003.
160 Braithwaite, 1996; and Zechner and others, 2000.
161 United Cities and Local Governments, 2007.
162 Grown, Gupta and Kes, 2005.
163 United Nations Children's Fund, 2007.
164 Drage, 2001.
165 Ibid.; and United Nations, 2007b.
166 United Nations, 2006g.
167 Artz, 1999.
168 Ibid.
169 United Nations, 2002d.
170 United Nations, 2006g.
171 United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 2005.
172 Ibid.
173 United Nations, 2002d.
174 Ibid.
175 United Nations, 2002d.

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Publications

Ending Violence against Women: From Words to Action—Study of the Secretary-General

The study, which addresses violence against women as a form of discrimination and a human rights violation, finds that such violence is severe and pervasive throughout the world, causing untold misery for women, harming families across generations, impoverishing communities and reinforcing other forms of violence throughout societies.

The study acknowledges the work of grass-roots women's organizations and movements around the world in bringing violence against women into the arena of public attention and State accountability. It analyses the causes, forms and consequences of violence against women, reviews available data and outlines States' obligations to address such violence. While the study describes promising practices in the areas of law, service provision for victims and prevention, it also notes remaining challenges in bringing an end to violence against women.

The study puts forward a blueprint for action, by different stakeholders, at local, national and international levels. Such action needs to involve demonstrations of political commitment; the investment of resources; and strong institutional mechanisms that can develop and implement comprehensive approaches for the prevention and eradication of all forms of violence against women. Securing women's human rights and promotion of gender equality are crucial to this agenda.

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